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**REPORT OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS
AND WALRUSES**

Tromsø, Norway, 28 February 2007

Amalie Jessen (Greenland) welcomed delegates to the new Management Committee on Seals and Walruses. There were a number of opening matters.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

2.

At NAMMCO 15 in 2006, it was agreed that Greenland should be offered the chairmanship of this newly formed Management Committee, and Amalie Jessen was appointed as Chair.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Árni Snæbjörnsson, Iceland was elected as Vice-Chair.

3.– 4. ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPOINTMENT OF RAPPORTEUR

The agenda was adopted (Appendix 1), and the Secretariat appointed as rapporteur.

5. REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS

Documents to the meeting were compiled in Appendix 2.

The Secretariat was charged with compiling a future list of documents for this Management Committee that would include relevant information on seal / walrus management and conservation, and sealing / walrus hunting, and form a library of literature available to NAMMCO members.

6. RULES OF PROCEDURE

This matter was discussed in the earlier re-titled Management Committee for Cetaceans, where it was agreed that for the moment, a simplified Rules of Procedure based on the existing one for the Management Committee would be adopted. The only change would be inclusion of plural Management Committees in the title.

The Committee agreed to revise their title to Management Committee for Seals and Walruses.

7. REVIEW OF PAST AND PRESENT RECOMMENDATIONS ON SEAL STOCKS, PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT, AND REQUESTS FOR ADVICE FROM THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE AND RESPONSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Report of the Management Committee for Seals and Walruses

The Committee had available three documents: NAMMCO/16/MC3, NAMMCO/16/MC4 and NAMMCO/16/5 (ANNEX 1, ANNEX 2 this section and Section 4 in Volume II).

7.1 Harp seals

It was noted that most requests were completed with some ongoing. There was a regular update through the joint ICES/NAFO WG following the Management Committee's request that the Scientific Committee annually discuss the scientific information available on harp and hooded seals and advice on catch quotas for these species given by the ICES/NAFO Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals. The advice by the Scientific Committee on catch quotas should not only be given as advice on replacement yields, but also levels of harvest that would be helpful in light of ecosystem management requirements.

North Atlantic – Barents / White and Greenland seas

Request for advice

At NAMMCO 14, the SC was requested to provide harvest levels be specified for the Barents/White Sea and Greenland Sea harp seal stocks that would result in a population reduction of 20% over a period of 20 years.

Response

New modelling results available for both stocks indicated that for the Greenland Sea stock, the requested stock size would be reached in 20 years with a total quota of either 35,482 1+ animals or 70,964 pups per year (if one 1+ animal is balanced by 2 pups, as in the current management regime); for the Barents/White Sea stock, the requested stock size would be reached in 20 years with a total quotas of either 98,490 1+ animals or 246,225 pups per year (one 1+ balanced by 2.5 pups, as in the current regime).

SC recommendation

Such a harvest programme should not be considered without a careful monitoring programme, involving surveys at intervals of 5 years or less, because the uncertainty of the predicted population size at the end of the period is very large in both cases.

General Comment

Norway noted that there was now different advice from the NAMMCO SC than the ICES/NAFO WG. Although the advice from the Scientific Committee was appreciated, Norway will not increase the harp seal quota this year as the lower quota as recommended by the ICES/NAFO is already set, and most likely will not be taken. The Management Committee noted the advice from the SC but did not make any recommendation. This topic would be discussed in depth in 2008.

Northwest Atlantic

Request for advice from 2005

Evaluate how a projected decrease in the total population of Northwest Atlantic harp

seals might affect the proportion of animals summering in Greenland.

Response

- The abundance of Northwest Atlantic harp seals may be stabilizing after a period of rapid increase (2004 survey).
- The numbers summering off West Greenland would be expected to also stabilize.
- However, the proportion of animals migrating to Greenland may not be constant and may change in response to environmental conditions.
- The age structure of the population will change as it stabilizes, and this may also affect the numbers summering in Greenland.
- Detailed information on harp seal migratory patterns are required to assess this.

SC recommendations

- ICES-NAFO Working Group be asked to address this request and recommended that Greenland forward this request to ICES.
- If that is not possible, organisation of a special working group, with active participation by Canada, to address the issue.

General Comment

It was noted that this question was still open and that it may be necessary to establish a WG including Canada to resolve this matter. The request to ICES/NAFO had not yet been made, but the Management Committee **recommended** that Greenland take the initiative.

7.2 Hooded Seals

Request for advice

Past requests include an update on the status of hooded seals with advice from the ICES/NAFO Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals. The following information has been provided.

Response

Greenland Sea

Stock status of this stock was determined as follows:

- Pup survey in 2005: current pup production was about 38% lower than in 1997.
- In the last two decades, the stock has stabilized at a low level, at only 10-15% of the level observed 60 years ago.
- Abundance for Greenland Sea hooded seals: 71,400 (95% C.I. 38,400-104,400) 1+ animals and pup production of 16,900 (95% C.I. 10,200-23,600).

The ICES/NAFO WG concluded that harvesting should not be permitted, mainly because of the observed decline in the stock, with the exception of catches for scientific purposes from 2007 on. During the past 25 years, the annual catch < 5000 (pups), has been much lower than the Total Allowable Catches given, and the Greenlandic catch from the Greenland Sea stock has been 3 - 67 annually. The sealers are concerned because they are not allowed to catch hooded seals this year. They insist that the stock is more numerous than the scientists have observed.

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The NAMMCO SC supports the conclusion of the ICES/NAFO WG, with nuances

- the low levels of recent harvests cannot have been the sole reason for the apparent decline in the stock; and
- recent harvests in East Greenland (Scoresbysund) are very low, and continuation of harvests at these levels will not appreciably affect the status of the stock.

SC recommendations

- Harvest should be restricted to necessary scientific catches and to satisfy local needs at roughly current levels.
- Careful monitoring programme should be established as recommended by the ICES/NAFO WG.
- Biological samples for determination of vital parameters be collected from the Greenlandic hunt in Ittoqqortoormiit.
- Recommendation should be revisited after results from the new abundance survey planned in 2007

General Comment

Greenland informed that Norway have asked permission to go into the Greenland area to harvest seals in the Greenland Sea. The decision concerning hooded seals will be made in the near future.

The Management Committee noted the recommendations from the SC.

7.3 Ringed Seals

There were no outstanding requests and no new information to report for this species.

7.4 Grey Seals

There were no outstanding requests and no new information to report for this species.

However, the Committee noted that the SC drew attention to the fact that the last assessment advice was in 2003, and that sufficient new information was now available in Iceland and Norway to make a new assessment.

The Faroes reported that there would be a satellite tracking programme for grey seals starting in the spring of 2007 with a view to further studies on feeding ecology and abundance. This information was welcomed by the Committee.

7.5 Harbour seals

New request for advice

Review and assess the status of harbour seals throughout the North Atlantic, including survey methods, stock delineation, ecology and fisheries interactions.

Response

A WG with emphasis on expertise on the North Atlantic and adjoining seas, notably the North Sea and Baltic, was convened in Copenhagen, 3-6 October 2006.

SC recommendations

NAMMCO Annual Report 2006

The SC supported the conclusions of the WG and the recommendations for research and monitoring. There were concerns about this species in many areas, and the following recommendations were brought forward:

Iceland

The population has decreased substantially over the past 26 years, and the SC strongly recommends

- better by-catch recording;
- continued monitoring of the stock, with surveys at 2-3 year intervals;
- a formal assessment to be conducted as soon as is feasible.

Greenland

Harbour seals have disappeared over much of their former range in West Greenland, with only a remnant population in the extreme south which may be small. The SC therefore strongly recommends

- that there is a consideration of a total cessation of harbour seal hunting in all of W. Greenland;
- the size of the remaining southern population should be estimated.

Norway

The current harvest, when combined with likely levels of by-catch and possible unreported levels of struck and lost, is probably not sustainable, and the allocated quotas are not sustainable. The SC strongly recommends

- better monitoring of by-catch in all fisheries;
- continued and frequent abundance surveys.

Faroe Islands

The harbour seal has not been breeding in the Faroes for more than a century.

All regions

There is a need for the establishment of clear management objectives for this species in all NAMMCO member countries where the species is extant. The SC recommended a requirement for

- Clear management objectives in Iceland Greenland and Norway;
- A plan for the Faroe Islands in case there was recolonization.

General Comment

Norway is currently working on a management plan for harbour seals.

The Faroe Islands took note of the SC report and recommendations but have no priority for a specific management plan at this time because the species no longer occurs in the Faroes.

Greenland is working on management plans for a number of species, including harbour seal. Until now work has focused on polar bears, walrus, narwhal and beluga. However, the next priority will be given to harbour seals.

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Reported catches have been very high, probably due to misreporting. Greenland has moved harbour seal to a different place on the list used to report catches, and only a catch of 24 was reported for 2006.

The Management Committee noted the responses of member countries to the recommendations from the Scientific Committee.

7.6 Atlantic Walrus

Request for advice

There was an ongoing request for advice for an assessment of this stock. Present removals were likely not sustainable for the North Water and West Greenland stocks, and it was recommended that new assessments for these stocks be completed as soon as identified research recommendations were fulfilled (survey reanalysis, new surveys, stock structure, and complete corrected catch series).

Response

Greenland had made considerable progress in this area of assessment through implementation of hunting regulations and the Greenland Institute for Natural Resources (GINR) developing a Research Plan for 2007-10.

SC recommendations

The SC supported the Greenlandic Research Plan, and encouraged Canada to support Greenland in their effort, since it has now been confirmed that the “West Greenland” walruses are in fact shared between eastern Baffin Island and West Greenland.

General Comment

Greenland informed that quotas and other regulations had been introduced under a new Executive Order, finalised in 2006. Thereafter, the government introduced 3-year quotas for the period 2007 – 2009. The approved 3-year quotas are designed to allow for a gradual reduction of catches that by 2009 will result in removals that will be within the sustainable levels recommended by the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources.

Greenland explained that the JCNB dealt originally with narwhal and beluga, and deals now also with walrus. NAMMCO has agreed that JCNB gives management advice for stocks of narwhal and beluga in West Greenland. A similar agreement could be reached about walrus. However, the interaction between JCNB and NAMMCO regarding management advice for walrus should be addressed.

The Management Committee welcomed this information, and **supported the recommendations** from the SC above. The relationship between JCNB and NAMMCO regarding walrus would be revisited next year.

New request for advice

Effects of human disturbance (incl. fishing and shipping activities) on distribution, behaviour and conservation status of walrus in West Greenland. This was considered as

Direct effects:

Fishing activities causing habitat degradation (damaging of sea floor and depletion of prey resources), and

Indirect effects:

Masking of underwater communication during breeding season by noise from fishing activities.

For evaluation, there should be spatial and temporal information on distribution of walrus, fishing operations, including characteristics of noise produced, walrus feeding ecology, habitat quality and the effect of trawling, and walrus vocalizations.

Response

Because of present lack of information, the SC was unable to respond to the request, and it is unlikely to be able to do so in the near term.

General Comment

The Committee took note of this information.

7.7 Marine Mammal – Fish Interactions

The Committee noted that this topic had already been considered under the Management Committee (for Cetaceans). However, it was also noted that there were a number of items directly related to harp and hooded seals that were ongoing in an ecosystem and modelling context. It had already been noted elsewhere (MCC, Section 2.1, Items 6.- 8.) that progress on these items was unlikely until extra funding was available, and results would not be realised for some time.

8. PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE WORK

Norway reported that a new survey for hooded seals would be starting in March 2007, and that they would wait until results were available before more was done on assessments.

Canada provided information about its work plan for the next few years. There would be harp seal surveys every 5 years (next either in 2008 or 2009) in the Northwest Atlantic. There was a grey seal survey being undertaken now (February 2007). Canada was also planning a workshop on the impact of seals on groundfish, including predation, parasites in cod, etc., and seal disturbance on cod aggregation.

Iceland informed that there were only two seal species in Iceland – grey and harbour seal, and that measurement of stock size had been ongoing for the last 20 years. Last year (2006) the harbour seal had been surveyed, and this year there would likely be a survey for grey seals.

Specific Recommendations for future work

Requests for Advice for the SC

Report of the Management Committee for Seals and Walruses

Hooded Seal

Greenland Sea

- The Scientific Committee is requested to investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline of this stock of hooded seals; and
- Assess the status of the stock on basis of the results from the planned survey in 2007.

Harbour Seal

The Scientific Committee is requested to conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour seals around Iceland and Norway as soon as feasible.

Walrus

The Scientific Committee is requested to provide a formal assessment of the Davis Strait stock as soon as finalization of the catch series is complete and the results from the planned 2007 survey are available.

The Scientific Committee is then requested to provide estimates of sustainable yields of the North Water and West Greenland stocks of walrus.

Proposals for Conservation and Management

Hooded Seals

Greenland Sea

Catches in the Greenland Sea should be restricted to necessary scientific catches and to satisfy local needs at roughly current levels.

Harbour Seal

Define management objectives for harbour seals in Norway, Iceland and Greenland.

Grey Seals

Define management objectives in Norway.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKSHOP ON STRUCK AND LOST

The Committee **requested** that the relevant recommendations made should be followed up.

Greenland explained that the loss rate used by the seal forum in 2005 in their assessment of harp seals was 50% for the open water hunt. A new study presented at the Struck and Lost (S&L) workshop estimated loss rates between 20-25%. This study also showed that approximately 30% of the hunters report struck and lost animals as part of their catch.

Canada currently uses a 50% S&L rate in open water Canadian Arctic and Greenland. The S&L rate for the Canadian commercial seal hunt is between 0 and 5%. The 50% S&L level used for the open water hunt has an impact on the Canadian total allowable harvest as it is applied to the Greenland harvest of around 70,000 seals. There is a

need to coordinate the work on S&L with the Committee on Hunting Methods. The MC for Seals and Walruses will follow up on all recommendations related to S&L rates. There will be a report on any developments to the next annual meeting.

The Committee **recommended** that all recommendations from the S&L workshop should be noted, and be followed up on problems associated with open sea/water hunt.

10. CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT MEASURES

Greenland introduced a new document on Management and Utilisation of Seals in Greenland (NAMMCO/16/INFO3).

The Committee **expressed its appreciation** for the general information provided by Greenland and noted the importance of ensuring that up-dated factual information about sealing is readily available for the general public.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sealing and the EU

Norway reported on a meeting with the Belgian Government, and also the Dutch and European Commission about sealskin imports. Norway plans to be more active in the EU arena and supply information about sealing activities, especially welfare issues. Norway appreciated the cooperation with Canada in providing information on sealing activities, because of the threatened banning of seal products. Greenland noted that, as future work the European Commission has decided to focus on the human killing aspect of sealing and advised that sealing countries should prepare information concerning killing methods.

Canada responded that they have been providing factual information to individual European countries, and that they intend to continue cooperation with Norway and Greenland on this matter. It was **requested** that the NAMMCO Secretariat should be more active in providing scientific information on sealing.

Proposed Sealing Conference

Norway reported that Finland has the chair of the Nordic Council of Ministers this year and will be focusing on seals and sealing in the Baltic. At a Nordic fisheries meeting in Norway in November 2006 to discuss the future of seals in the Baltic and resource utilization from Baltic areas, a resolution was adopted for grey seals in which a decision by six EU countries and also Nordic countries was made to promote a study on how the Baltic seal populations should be managed in view of present and foreseeable legislation and taken into account regional differences and needs; and in addition to initiate the study on the possible future market for Baltic seal products including the need for vitalizing historical knowledge, education and training (Nordic-Baltic Ministerial Declaration on the grey seals in the Baltic Sea, ref. NORDEN 60001.15.002/06, adopted 7 November 2006). A conference is planned for October 2007 in Finland on sealing in the Baltic and elsewhere.

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It was considered useful for NAMMCO to collaborate in this conference, as challenges relating to seal management are similar in all places. The Chair of the Council had already discussed possible collaboration between NAMMCO and the Nordic Council of Ministers and recommended that this be pursued. It was noted that it would also be important for Canada and the Russian Federation to be involved.

The Committee agreed that NAMMCO should have an active role in this conference, and **recommended** that the Council take steps to ensure the appropriate involvement.

12. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

There were no other matters for consideration, and the Chair thanked all participants to the meeting and declared the meeting closed.

The draft report was approved, and the final version agreed by correspondence.

Appendix 1 - AGENDA

1. Election of Chairman
2. Election of Vice Chairman
3. Adoption of agenda
4. Appointment of rapporteur
5. Review of documents
6. Rules of Procedure
7. Review of past and present recommendations on seal stocks
8. Priorities for future work
9. Recommendations from Workshop on Struck and Lost
10. Conservation & management measures
11. Recommendations for scientific research
12. Any other business

Appendix 2 – LIST OF DOCUMENTS

NAMMCO/16/SMC/1	List of Documents
NAMMCO/16/SMC/2	Agenda
NAMMCO/16/SMC/3	Rules of Procedure - draft
NAMMCO/16/SMC/4	Status of past proposals for conservation and management - seals
NAMMCO/16/SMC/5	Summary of active requests by NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee and responses by the Scientific Committee - seals
NAMMCO/16/5	Report of the Scientific Committee
NAMMCO/16/8 – Annex 1	Report of the NAMMCO Workshop on Struck and Lost