

NAMMCO



MEETING OF THE
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
FOR SEALS AND WALRUS

23 March 2021
Online

REPORT

© North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission

Please cite this report as:

NAMMCO-North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (2021). *Report from the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus*. March, 2021. Tromsø, Norway: NAMMCO.

Available at https://nammco.no/topics/mc_reports/

DISCLAIMER:

The content of this report contains the view of the NAMMCO Management Committees and does not necessarily represent the views of the NAMMCO Council.

NAMMCO

Postbox 6453, Sykehusveien 21-23, N-9294 Tromsø, Norway, +47 77687371, nammco-sec@nammco.org,

www.nammco.org, www.facebook.com/nammco.no/, https://twitter.com/NAMMCO_sec

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Chair’s Opening Remarks.....	4
2. Agenda	4
3. Conservation and Management Measures for Seal Stocks	4
3.1 Harp seals	4
3.1.1 New Advice on Sustainable Catch.....	5
3.1.2 New Recommendations for Research.....	5
3.2 Hooded seals	5
3.2.1 New Advice on Sustainable Catch.....	5
3.2.2 New Recommendations for Research.....	5
3.3 Grey seals	5
3.4 Harbour seals.....	5
3.4.1 New Proposal for Conservation and Management	6
3.4.2 New Recommendations for Research.....	6
3.5 Ringed seals.....	6
3.5.1 For Information - New Request from Council & SC Response.....	6
3.5.2 Request for Advice Considered Answered by the SC.....	7
3.6 Bearded seals.....	7
3.6.1 For Information - New Request from Council & SC Response.....	7
3.7 Walrus	7
3.7.1 Request for Advice Considered Answered by the SC.....	7
4. Any Other Business	8
5. Adoption of Report.....	8
Appendix 1: Participant List	9
Appendix 2: Document List	13
Appendix 3: Agenda	15

1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), Guro Gjelsvik (NO), welcomed participants to the meeting (see Appendix 1 of this report for the list of participants) and noted that Charlotte Winsnes from the NAMMCO Secretariat would act as rapporteur.

The Chair noted that all the meeting documents had been made available on the NAMMCO website two weeks prior to the meeting. The list of meeting documents is available in Appendix 2 of this report. The Chair drew particular attention to the following documents as relevant for all agenda items:

NAMMCO/28/MC/05: List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research, with Responses from the Parties.

NAMMCO/28/MC/06: List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee.

The Chair noted that prior to the meeting, Member Countries were invited to submit updates in writing on advances towards the implementation of previous proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research.

It was also noted that all Member Countries had reported their catch statistics prior to the meeting and that the online [NAMMCO catch database](#) had been updated accordingly.

The Chair then informed participants that due to time constraints connected to the online format, the meeting would focus on:

- a) Reviewing new management advice regarding hunting quota,
- b) Deciding whether to endorse new proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research (with implications for Member Countries) made by the Scientific Committee (SC) during their meetings in 2019 and 2021, and
- c) Determining whether any requests for advice may be considered completed and closed.

This means that only information related to the above items would be presented to the meeting. Additional information on all species is available in the SC reports (see document NAMMCO/28/08).

2. AGENDA

The agenda was adopted and is available as Appendix 3.

3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEAL STOCKS

3.1 HARP SEALS

The Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee, Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid (GL), provided a summary of the 2019 meeting of the Joint ICES-NAFO-NAMMCO Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals (WGHARP) & the 2020 NAMMCO-ICES Seal Modelling Workshop. A copy of this presentation is available on the NAMMCO website here: <https://nammco.no/meetings/management-committees/>

It was noted that a special restricted Council-HoDs meeting in March 2020 had endorsed the SC26 recommendation to convene the Seal Modelling Workshop. The Seal Modelling Workshop aimed to review and improve the seal population assessment models used for harp and hooded seals as they were performing inadequately and needed to be further developed to provide a reliable basis for future assessments. A report from this workshop is in development and will be published in Volume 12 of *NAMMCO Scientific Publications* when it is finalised.

3.1.1 New Advice on Sustainable Catch

SC26 recommended an upper limit for removals for the White Sea/Barents Sea stock of 21,172 seals, and 11,548 seals for the Greenland Sea stock.

Further information on the assessment is available in section 8.1.2 from [page 29 of the SC26 report](#).

The MCSW **endorsed** the recommended upper limits for removals and agreed to forward the management advice to the Governments of Norway and Greenland.

It also noted that according to this advice, catches on harp seals from the local communities in East Greenland may continue.

3.1.2 New Recommendations for Research

SC26 made the following new recommendations for research with implications for member countries:

- *New aerial surveys of harp seal pups in the Greenland Sea be carried out in 2022.*
- *Norway continue its efforts to obtain reproductive samples, particularly in years when an aerial survey is completed.*

It was noted that SC26 had also recommended that a new aerial survey of harp seal pups in the White Sea be conducted in 2020 but that this had not been carried out due to the global pandemic.

The MCSW **endorsed** the new recommendations for research.

3.2 HOODED SEALS

3.2.1 New Advice on Sustainable Catch

For the Greenland Sea stock, SC27 recommended that there be no commercial catch but that hunting by local communities and for scientific purposes may continue at current levels.

Further information on the assessment is available in section 8.2.2 from [page 31 of the SC26 report](#).

The MCSW **endorsed** the recommendation regarding sustainable catch quota and agreed to forward the management advice to the Governments of Norway and Greenland.

3.2.2 New Recommendations for Research

SC26 made the following new recommendation for research with implications for member countries:

- *New aerial surveys of hooded seal pups in the Greenland Sea be carried out in 2022.*

The MCSW **endorsed** the new recommendation for research.

3.3 GREY SEALS

The Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee, Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid (GL), provided a summary of the 2021 meeting of the Coastal Seals Working Group (CSWG). A copy of this presentation is available here: <https://nammco.no/meetings/management-committees/>

It was noted that Iceland had been prevented from participating in that meeting due to illness so the focus had been on reviewing status updates from Norway and the Faroe Islands.

It was noted that SC26 had reiterated its recommendations that the Faroe Islands continue the work to provide total summer counts and conduct ongoing monitoring of the breeding sites as well as higher resolution tracking of grey seals.

3.4 HARBOUR SEALS

As noted under item 3.3 on grey seals, Iceland had not been able to participate in the CSWG meeting in 2021. For harbour seals, the focus had therefore been on reviewing updates from Norway and Greenland.

3.4.1 New Proposal for Conservation and Management

The MCSW was informed that there were significant errors in the historical catch statistics on harbour seals in Greenland, due to mistakes in species identification between ringed seals and harbour seals, and due to these two species being placed next to each other in the form of the reporting scheme for the species caught. SC26 therefore recommended that:

- NAMMCO discuss the proposal that all catch statistics for harbour seals in Greenland be removed from the NAMMCO website due to known errors and a lack of validation.

The MCSW **agreed** to remove the statistics from the website up to and including 2011, noting that the species had been protected since 2010 in Greenland.

Greenland also agreed to provide an explanatory note on this for the relevant section of the catch database on the NAMMCO website.

3.4.2 New Recommendations for Research

SC26 made the following new recommendations for research with implication for member countries:

- Greenland enhance efforts to identify new breeding and moulting sites for harbour seals (particularly in West Greenland) using most feasible methods in the different areas.

- Norway complete the collection and analysis of DNA samples from harbour seal pups to help determine stock structure and propose more scientifically based management units.

Discussion

Tobias Ignatiussen (KNAPK) informed the MCSW that when growing up in Skjoldungen (a now abandoned settlement 300 km south of Tasiilaq), harbour seals had been plentiful and that this was still the case when he revisited the hunting places two years ago. He also said that there were hunters that could not distinguish harbour seals from ringed seals and that was the reason why they did not report them.

Norway informed that it had enhanced the collection and analysis of DNA samples from harbour seal pups to help determine stock structure and propose more scientifically based management units. Based on this, it has initiated a process to revise the management plans for both harbour and grey seals. This process involves comprehensive DNA sampling of harbour seal pups and analysis to establish genetically based management units. The proposal for revised management plans will include a clearly defined management objective for each species, harvest strategies and precautionary reference points.

As part of this process, a population viability analysis will be conducted to identify the minimum abundance within a management unit required before any harvest can be considered.

The proposal for revised management plans is scheduled to be submitted to the Ministry by autumn 2022.

The MCSW **endorsed** the new recommendations for research.

3.5 RINGED SEALS

3.5.1 For Information - New Request from Council & SC Response

At a special restricted Council-HoDs meeting in 2020, a new request (R-2.3.3) was made to the SC that they convene a Ringed Seal Working Group in 2022 with the aim of conducting a thorough review of the existing data and performing an assessment of stocks where possible. If the data required for a full assessment of (some of) the stocks are not available, the WGs and the SC should identify, and prioritise, which specific data essential to their assessments are still needed.

SC27 agreed that a WG on this species would not be delayed beyond 2022. It also agreed that as a first step, an overview of information required and available to perform an assessment should be collated,

together with a review of available published literature. An intern at the Secretariat will begin the work on this review in 2021.

The MCSW noted that the Council had requested the WG be convened before 2023.

3.5.2 Request for Advice Considered Answered by the SC

Request R-2.3.2: *To advise on what scientific studies need to be completed to evaluate the effects of changed levels of removals of ringed seals in West and East Greenland.*

The SC has noted that assessing the status of ringed seals and the effects of harvests is particularly challenging given simultaneous changes in sea ice conditions, marine productivity and polar bear predation. Due to the unpredictable changes in these parameters, producing estimates of sustainable catches requires a significant investment of resources for research on:

- abundance estimates
- productivity and age distribution of the catch
- changes in the required environmental parameters such as stable ice and suitable snow for breeding, as well as glacial fronts for foraging.

In providing this overview of the important topics for research to evaluate the effects of changed levels of ringed seal removals in Greenland, the SC considers this request to be answered.

The MCSW **agreed** that the request had been answered by the SC and recommended to Council that the request be closed.

3.6 BEARDED SEALS

3.6.1 For Information - New Request from Council & SC Response

Just as for ringed seals, a special restricted Council-HoDs meeting in 2020, made a new request (R-2.7.1) that the SC convene a Bearded Seal Working Group in 2022 with the aim of conducting a thorough review of the existing data and performing an assessment of stocks where possible. If the data required for a full assessment of (some of) the stocks are not available, the WGs and the SC should identify, and prioritise, which specific data essential to their assessments are still needed.

The SC27 agreed that a WG on this species would not be delayed beyond 2022. It also agreed that as a first step, an overview of information required and available to perform an assessment should be collated, together with a review of the available published literature. An intern at the Secretariat will begin the work on this review in 2021.

The MCSW noted that the Council had requested the WG be convened before 2023.

3.7 WALRUS

3.7.1 Request for Advice Considered Answered by the SC

Request R-2.6.8: *Provide assessments, and advice on, the sustainability of allowing walrus hunt all year round in Greenland on all stocks.*

At SC26 in 2019, the SC concluded that it did not see any particular issues with allowing a hunt all year round but emphasised the importance of any catch of a female with a calf being reported as two animals (independent of whether the calf is retrieved or not).

The MCSW **agreed** that the request had been answered by the SC and recommended to Council that the request be closed.

Greenland noted that the revision of the executive order on walrus will include the new answer from the Scientific Committee and will make sure that any catch of a female with a calf is reported as two individuals, when/if the regulation is adopted by the Government.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No items were presented for discussion.

5. ADOPTION OF REPORT

A draft of the report was circulated on 24 March 2021 and was finalised and adopted on 25 March 2021.

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT LIST**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

Kate Sanderson - Chair of Council
Foreign Service
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture
FO-110 Tórshavn
Faroe Islands
KateS@ummr.fo

Guro Gjelsvik - Chair of MCSW
Directorate of Fisheries
PO Box 185 Sentrum
NO-5804 Bergen
Norway
guro.gjelsvik@fiskeridir.no

FAROE ISLANDS

Páll Nolsøe (HoD)
Foreign Service
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture
FO-110 Tórshavn
Faroe Islands
palln@ummr.fo

Ulla Svarrer Wang
Ministry of Fisheries
PO Box 347
FO-110 Tórshavn
Faroe Islands
ulla.svarrer.wang@fisk.fo

Ólavur Sjurðarberg
The Pilot Whalers Association
FO-110 Tórshavn
Faroe Islands
olavur.sjurdarberg@skulin.fo

GREENLAND

Amalie Jessen (HoD)
Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture
PO Box 29
GL-3900 Nuuk
Greenland
amalie@nanoq.gl

Sofie Abelsen
Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture
PO Box 29
GL-3900 Nuuk
Greenland
soab@nanoq.gl

Jesper Ødegård Jakobsen
Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture
PO Box 29
GL-3900 Nuuk
Greenland
jeod@nanoq.gl

Åge Hammeken Danielsen
Association of Fishers and Hunters in
Greenland (KNAPK)
GL-3980 Ittoqqortoormiit
Greenland

Tobias Ignatiussen
KNAPK
Kuummiut,
GL-3913 Tasiilaq
Greenland

Bjarne Lyberth
KNAPK Secretariat
GL-3900 Nuuk
Greenland

ICELAND

Ásta Einarsdóttir (HoD)
Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
Ministry of Industries and Innovation
Skúlagötu 4,
IS-150 Reykjavik
Iceland
asta.einarsdottir@anr.is

Guðni Magnús Eiríksson
Directorate of Fisheries
IS-220 Hafnarfjörður
Iceland
Gudni.M.Eiriksson@fiskistofa.is

Sandra Granquist
Icelandic Seal Center and Marine and
Freshwater Research Institute
IS-530 Hvammstangi
Iceland
sandra.magdalena.granquist@hafogvatn.is

Kristján Loftsson
Hvalur H.F.
IS-222 Hafnafjordur
Iceland
kl@hvalur.is

Gísli Víkingsson
Marine and Freshwater Research Institute
Fornubúðum 5
IS-220 Hafnarfjörður
Iceland
gisli.vikingsson@hafogvatn.is

NORWAY

Ole-David Stenseth (HoD)
Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries
PO Box 8118 Dep
NO-0032 Oslo
Norway
ods@nfd.dep.no

Alessandro Astroza
Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries
PO Box 8118 Dep
NO-0032 Oslo
Norway
ata@nfd.dep.no

Arne Bjørge
Institute of Marine Research
Blindernveien 31
NO-0371 Oslo
Norway
arne.bjoerge@hi.no

Tore Haug
Institute of Marine Research
PO Box 6404
NO-9294 Tromsø
Norway
tore.haug@hi.no

Steinar Lindberg
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
PO Box 8114 Dep
NO-0032 Oslo
Norway
steinar.lindberg@mfa.no

Kathrine A. Ryeng
Institute of Marine Research
PO Box 6404
NO-9294 Tromsø
Norway
kathrine.ryeng@hi.no

Hild Ynnesdal
Directorate of Fisheries
PO Box 185 Sentrum
NO-5804 Bergen
Norway
hild.ynnesdal@fiskeridir.no

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Bjarni Mikkelsen (Chair)
Faroe Marine Research Institute
FO-100 Tórshavn
Faroe Islands
bjarnim@hav.fo

Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid (Vice-Chair)
Greenland Institute of Natural Resources
GL-3900 Nuuk
Greenland
aqro@natur.gl

OBSERVER GOVERNMENTS

CANADA

Amber Lindstedt
International Fisheries Management
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
CA-K1A 0E6 Ottawa, ON
Canada
Amber.Lindstedt@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Daniel Townsend
 International Fisheries Management
 Fisheries and Oceans Canada
 CA-K1A 0E6 Ottawa, ON
 Canada
Daniel.Townsend@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Romy Vaugeois
 Seals & Sealing Network
 Fur Institute of Canada
 Canada
romy@sealsandsealing.net

DENMARK

Anne Birgitte Hansen (C)
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 DK-1448 Copenhagen
 Denmark
anbiha@um.dk

JAPAN

Hideki Moronuki (C)
 Fisheries Agency of Japan
 Japan
hideki_moronuki600@maff.go.jp

Shinichi Suzuki
 Fisheries Agency of Japan
 Japan
shinichi_suzuki930@maff.go.jp

Luis A. Pastene
 Institute of Cetacean Research
 Japan
pastene@cetacean.jp

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Elizabeth Phelps
 U.S. Department of State
 USA
PhelpsE@state.gov

Mi Ae Kim
 National Oceanic and Atmospheric
 Administration (NOAA)
 USA
mi.ae.kim@noaa.gov

INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

International Whaling Commission (IWC)
 The Red House
 UK-CB4 4NP Cambridge
 United Kingdom
 Observer:
 Iain Staniland, iain.staniland@iwc.int

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Livelihood International (Livin)
 Gil Theriault
 Magdalen Islands, Quebec
 Canada
info@livintl.org

Makivik Corporation
 Department of Environment, Wildlife &
 Research
 CA-H4M 2X6 St. Laurent, Quebec
 Canada
 Observer:
 Gregor Gilbert, ggilbert@makivik.org

Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.
 PO Box 638 Iqaluit
 Nunavut X0A 0H0
 Canada
 Observers:
 David Lee, DLee@tunngavik.com
 Paul Irngaut, pirngaut@tunngavik.com

IWMC World Conservation Trust
 CH-1006 Lausanne
 Switzerland
 Observer:
 Nikolas Sellheim,
sellheim.consulting@gmail.com

NAMMCO SECRETARIAT

NAMMCO
PO Box 6453
NO-9294 Tromsø
Norway

Geneviève Desportes
genevieve@nammco.org

Mana Tugend
mana.tugend@gmail.com

Nicolai Pilgård Scherdin
intern@nammco.org

Charlotte Winsnes
charlotte@nammco.org

Fern Wickson
fern@nammco.org

INTERPRETERS

Kikkik Olsen, Greenland
Aqqaluk Lynge Egede, Greenland

APPENDIX 2: DOCUMENT LIST**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES - JOINT LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

Doc. No.	Title	Agenda
NAMMCO/28/08	Summary: Scientific Committee Reports 2019 & 2021	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/01	Joint List of Documents for the Management Committees	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/02a	Draft Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/28/MC/02b	Draft Annotated Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/28/MC/03a	Draft Agenda Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW)	MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/03b	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW)	MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/04a	Draft Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/28/MC/04b	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/28/MC/05	List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research, with Responses from Parties	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/06	List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/07	Strengthening User Knowledge in NAMMCO	MCJ
For Information		
NAMMCO/28/MC/FI01	Report from the 27 th Meeting of the Scientific Committee - 2021	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/FI02	Report from the 26 th Meeting of the Scientific Committee - 2019	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/FI03	FAO (2021). Fishing operations. Guidelines to prevent and reduce bycatch of marine mammals in capture fisheries. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No 1, Suppl.4. Rome.	MCJ
NAMMCO/28/MC/FI04	Baffinland (2018). Popular Summary: Mary River Project, Phase 2 Proposal.	MCJ
NAMMCO/28/MC/FI05	Arctic Council (2019). Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Marine Activities: Findings for Policy Makers	MCJ

NAMMCO/28/MC/FI06	NORDECO Project Description - Arctic User Knowledge Network: From Local to Global	MCJ
NAMMCO/28/MC/FI07	A. Jessen (2021). Arctic User Knowledge in Practice in Greenland: Presentation at NORDECO project workshop	MCJ

APPENDIX 3: AGENDA

AGENDA

- 1. Chair's Opening Remarks**

- 2. Adoption of Agenda**

- 3. Conservation and Management Measures for Seal Stocks**
 - 3.1. Harp seals**
 - 3.2. Hooded seals**
 - 3.3. Grey seals**
 - 3.4. Harbour seals**
 - 3.5. Ringed seals**
 - 3.6. Bearded seals**
 - 3.7. Walrus**

- 4. Any Other Business**