



TWENTY SIXTH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

7 - 8 March 2018, Tromsø, Norway

DOCUMENT OS OPENING STATEMENTS

Submitted by:

Member countries:

- Faroes Islands - coming
- Greenland
- Iceland
- Norway

Observer countries:

- Canada
- Denmark
- Japan
- Russia

Observers:

- IWC
- IWMC/Livelihood International
- NTI
- Makivik Corporation

Opening statement by Greenland

Mrs Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

NAMMCO 26

First of all, thank you for the warm welcome we have received here in beautiful Tromsø. This meeting marks the 26th time the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) has gathered together to address issues on the conservation and management of marine mammals. In that period of time, a lot of work which we can be proud of has been done. Through joint effort, we all have improved our management systems for the sustainable utilization of our marine resources.

The best available knowledge

Our knowledge of our marine mammal stocks has been steadily improving, and thus improving the management advice. The foundation of that has been the weeks and months spent doing field work by the scientific community in collaboration with local hunters and fishermen. The view from Greenland is that the best available knowledge is attained by combining the two knowledge systems of local, indigenous knowledge with the scientific data. Then it is up to the politicians to make the final decision.

Issue solving

When an issue rises, NAMMCO takes action. The latest example of this is the forming of The Working group on by-catch, entanglements and live stranding (WG BYCELS). BYCELS was formed to deal with issues regarding animal welfare, and it demonstrates the commitment of the Commission to deal with all matters regarding the welfare and better responsible utilization of marine mammals.

The next 25 years

Last year in Nuuk, Greenland, we celebrated 25 years since the official start of NAMMCO. The last 25 years has presented NAMMCO with challenges regarding climate change, interactions with fisheries, hunting methods, tourism and public opinion. Greenland is grateful for the continued support and dedication shown by the member countries.

The desire to improve has always been there. And with the next 25 years on mind, NAMMCO last year initiated two projects to further develop NAMMCO. Firstly, an external independent Performance Review of the Commission was commenced. Greenland hopes that the initiative will strengthen our efforts to improve conservation and management of marine mammals. And secondly, an internal SWOT-analysis process was agreed upon, to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and threats of NAMMCO. Hereby showing what has and what has not been achieved with our present means and structure, and move towards an even stronger NAMMCO for the future. Greenland is excited to see the result of the work done by the panel at NAMMCO 27.

We hope for a positive and constructive meeting.

Qujanaq – Thank you.

Opening Statement by Iceland

Madam Chair, delegates and observers

Iceland is pleased to be here in Tromsø for the 26th Annual Meeting of NAMMCO.

Iceland places great emphasis on the sustainable management on the living resources of the ocean, both domestically as well as regionally, based on the best available science.

Iceland firmly support the regional approach as the appropriate model for international cooperation on sustainable management living marine resources and that NAMMCO is the fora in the respect for advising on management of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. It can also be noted on the importance of this cooperation that NAMMCOS contracting parties are among those nations that are most reliant on the sustainable management of the oceans.

NAMMCO's scientific cooperation is its mainstay and has through the years laid the foundation for responsible and sustainable management of marine mammal's resources by NAMMCO members.

In this respect we note the performance review that NAMMCO is undergoing and the opportunity that the results of that review bring to strengthen NAMMCO's work even further. We would like to thank the Secretariat for their efficient preparation of this meeting, and Norway for "supplying" us with the beautiful surroundings here in Tromsø and look forward to a fruitful meeting.

Opening statement by Norway

Madame Chair, Delegates, Observers and Guests - Dear friends

Welcome you to the city of Tromsø, the Arctic capital of Norway.

NAMMCO at 26 is an well established organisation, constructive in its work and forward looking. Norway would like to express its sincere gratitude to all the parties, and the secretariat, for contributing to this unique environment off cooperation.

The management of marine mammals represents challenges of various kinds. In NAMMCO we meet these with a solid combination of the best available science and the knowhow of the hunter. This knowledgbase puts NAMMCO in a hands-on position for effective management.

It is Norway's goal to secure and further develop our organization in this respect.

At this meeting we are particularly looking forward to the report from the first meeting in The working group on by catch, entanglement and live strandings - because animal welfare and human safety is important – and because we have the competence to achieve something meaningful.

We like wise look forward to the reporting and publication of the results from the project exploring the consumption og marine mammals in our waters – because we believe this will strengthen our ambitions of a more holistic approach to marine mammals and their role in the ecosystem.

We further hope we can agree on a review of The observation scheme and its implementation in order to strengthen the knowledge and insight that this tool can provide.

The Scientific Committee is doing an excellent and important job and it is therefore very promising that we now are seeing solid recruitment to the committee from almost all off the parties.

Progress reports have also this year been submitted by Canada, Japan and Russia. This is a sign of strengthening cooperation between our countries that Norway very much welcomes.

I look forward to and wish you all a fruitful meeting.

Thank you.

Opening Statement by Canada

Madame Chair, Distinguished delegates, fellow observers.

Canada is pleased to participate as an Observer in this 26th meeting of the NAMMCO Council and would like to thank NAMMCO for bringing us together. These are important meetings that inform our positions on the research, management and conservation of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. Furthermore, we would also like to thank the NAMMCO Secretariat for hosting this meeting in Tromsø, Norway (tusen hjertelig takk), and to the Secretariat for their hard work, responsiveness and solid communication to bring us together for NAMMCO 26.

Canada recognizes NAMMCO as a credible and respected international organization that provides a regional mechanism for developing common positions on the management and conservation of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. Canada also values the importance of collaborating with our international partners on the science and management of marine mammals. Equally so, we value fostering and maintaining our close relationship with NAMMCO participants to ensure a coordinated approach to research and conservation efforts.

Canada has Indigenous subsistence harvests of bowhead whales, beluga, narwhal, walrus and seals which take place in communities in Northern Québec, Labrador, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Ringed seals, with a current population estimated at 2 million, are harvested in Canada's North primarily for subsistence purposes by Indigenous communities. Harp and grey seals, however, are the only commercially harvested seal species in Canada; with harp seals accounting for the majority of seals harvested. The Northwest Atlantic harp seal herd, which resides primarily in Canada, is estimated at approximately 7.4 million seals and grey seals are estimated at approximately 425 thousand. Harp and grey seals are harvested in Atlantic Canada, primarily in Newfoundland and Labrador, but also in small numbers in Québec as part of the commercial harvest.

The livelihoods of many Canadians depend on marine mammal resources and the ecosystems within which they exist. The interaction between marine mammal harvesters and the resources they harvest is also an important aspect of harvester livelihoods and those who depend on these resources. Respecting this, sustainable use and conservation are integral to the management of these resources.

In order for Canada to be the best it can be on the international stage of marine mammal management, it is essential that our global partners understand and respect the special partnerships with Indigenous peoples that form our approaches to management in Canada. In Canada's North, we have a saying that, "one does not go hunting alone". At the heart of this mantra are *success* and *survival* – two goals that are reached through collaboration, cooperation and mutual support. This is our model in Canada. This is co-management.

Through our co-management approach, Canada continues to work on ensuring that harvests of marine mammals are based on the best available scientific information, Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit (IQ), local and traditional knowledge bases in order to provide long-term social and economic benefits to the communities whose livelihoods depend on these resources.

As you know, Canada is considering its status within NAMMCO. Respecting Canada's unique context and special Indigenous-Crown relationships, which should be regarded as offering strength to international marine mammal science, conservation and management efforts, this discussion is one that, by necessity, has to happen fully and completely at home first. One does not go hunting alone. These discussions in Canada are happening and will help inform Canada's consideration of its status within NAMMCO.

In the meantime, however, we are here, we are innovative, and appreciate the opportunity to share these perspectives with you. Canada is, of course, looking forward to continued bilateral engagement with NAMMCO members within other fora, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Canada/Greenland Joint Commission on the Conservation and Management of Narwhal and Beluga (JCNB) and through the work of the International Whaling Commission, where Canada is an Observer.

We are looking forward to positive discussions over the next two days and continue appreciating the opportunity to join you all for the NAMMCO Council Meeting. Thank you,

Merci, Qujannamiik, Matna and Koana.

Opening statement by Denmark

Thank you Madame chair – dear delegates, fellow observers - ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I would like to thank the NAMMCO Secretariat for welcoming us here in Tromsø. It is always a pleasure to be here.

General remarks

From the Danish side we very much welcome the work of NAMMCO. Over the years, NAMMCO has proved to be a good example of regional cooperation on the management of living marine resources. NAMMCO is an important supplement to other fora and organization dealing with marine mammals. The IWC and NAMMCO have crosscutting tasks and interests. It is therefore natural and positive that the cooperation between the two is enhancing.

IWC

When it comes to the IWC, the Danish government works very closely together with the Faroes and Greenland to pursue our common interests. As you all know, our primary concern in the IWC is Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling. This year, our main focus will of course be on the renewal of the Greenlandic quotas. But we are also focusing on broader issues – especially the introduction of a rights based for Indigenous Peoples. It is a very important agenda that was discussed in depth at an ASW workshop in Manitsoq in 2015. The ASW stakeholders are meeting once again in Alaska next month to follow up on that workshop. The aim is to deliver substantial input on the long term ASW issues to the IWC meeting in Brazil later this year.

Seals - EU

For almost a decade the Danish and Greenlandic governments have worked together to minimize the negative effects of the EU's sealskin regulation – and we will continue to do so.

Last year, the main exporter of sealskin in Greenland, Great Greenland, and the Greenlandic government introduced the idea of QR code system that will make it possible for the European public to be fully aware of the legality of seal products from Greenland. We are pleased that the European Commission has welcomed this initiative, and we are looking forward to seeing it work in practice. Of course, this initiative does not eliminate all the negative effects of the sealskin regulation, but we believe it is a step in the right direction.

Seals – Denmark

Finally, I would like to give you a short update on the population of seals in Denmark. Over the last 15 years the number of harbour and grey seals in Denmark have increased quite dramatically. This is of course a positive development. However, the seals are also damaging fishing equipment and fish stocks around the country. This is of great concern to the Danish fishing industry and other stakeholders.

Therefore, the Danish government is currently working on a new management plan for seals to secure the right balance between the different interests that are at stake. This plan will be launched in the near future.

That was all from my side. I am looking very much forward learning more about the work of NAMMCO in the days to come.

Thank you for your attention!

Opening Statement by Japan

At the outset, Japan would like to thank the Secretariat of NAMMCO for hosting the important meeting of NAMMCO Council, with great hospitality and efficiency. We recognize that NAMMCO has made great achievements in the conservation and management of marine mammals including cetaceans, and in this regard, Japan fully supports “NUUK DECLARATION” adopted at the last Council meeting, which reaffirmed that NAMMCO fulfils its role as an appropriate international organization in accordance with the UNCLOS. Japan wishes to further contribute to this organization irrespective of its status as an observer.

Japan shares with NAMMCO various important agendas for management and conservation of whale resources. One of those agendas, for example, is the establishment of science-based catch limits. Japan has been and will be committed to the collection of scientific information which contributes to setting safe catch limits of various whale species such as minke whale, Bryde’s whale, sei whale and fin whale in the Antarctic Ocean and in the western North Pacific. As you all know, Japan has been conducting two research programs in those areas (New Scientific Whale Research Programs in the Antarctic Ocean and North Pacific: NEWREP-A and NEWREP-NP) in order to collect relevant scientific information for this purpose. In order to strengthen its science-based approach, Japan is eager to further enhance collaboration with NAMMCO and its members. It is really necessary for us to seriously consider the establishment of sound science-based catch limits for achieving sustainable use of whales, *inter alia*, at its vicinity.

Our common goal of sustainable use of cetaceans is envisaged to be shared at the IWC as well. However, it is regrettable that the goal has been neglected by some Members of the IWC for a long time. Any international organization that cannot pursue and even neglects its own objectives and purposes cannot be considered normal. In order to rectify such abnormal and dysfunctional situation, the real issue which has been hindering the IWC from pursuing its objectives and purposes, i.e. the fundamental difference in positions on whales and whaling, has to be sincerely discussed at the IWC. Unless IWC Members sincerely tackle this fundamental issue and find a relevant solution, the IWC would just lose its *raison d’être*.

In order to alleviate the long standing stagnated situation, at the last IWC Commission meeting in 2016, it was agreed to initiate so-called “Way Forward of the IWC” process so that all the IWC Members could make frank exchange of views on the fundamental issue of “whales and whaling” in order to find “a way forward of the IWC” that would be beneficial to all the IWC Members including those which support sustainable use of whales and those which wish to achieve full protection of whales. In this regard, Japan would greatly appreciate for your active participation in the discussions at the “Way Forward” process.

Finally, Japan would like to reconfirm its strong view that effective collaboration between Japan and NAMMCO is a vital force to promote conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources including cetaceans in international fora. At this Council meeting, Japan is willing to participate in every discussion which would further promote this important collaboration.

Thank you for your attention.

Opening Statement by the Russian Federation

Dear NAMMCO Chairman and Vice-Chairman, NAMMCO countries, Members of NAMMCO Secretariat, delegates, colleagues, observers, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to represent the Russian Federation as observer at 26th Meeting of the NAMMCO Council. Thank you very much for invitation!

On behalf of the Russian Federation, I would like to thank the NAMMCO Secretariat and Norwegian authorities for hosting this annual meeting in the Tromso which is very beautiful place above Arctic Circle. Thank you very for the excellent arrangements, and also for the preparations this meeting.

I would like to commend the excellent work undertaken by different NAMMCO bodies and in the first NAMMCO Secretariat and Scientific Committee including different working groups during the intersessional time. Also Russian Federation would like note that NAMMCO has very good cooperation with different countries not only observer countries, marine mammals companies and different North Atlantic organizations and Commissions in the first it is NAFO, NEAFC, ICES and IWC.

It is very important that NAMMCO position by marine mammals many years bases on strong ecosystem approach only and hence from it all marine mammals stocks can be stably exploited on base of scientific results and surveys and also of precautionary principles only. This reason here very important place belongs to results of International Trans North Atlantic Sighting Survey.

I would like to tell you once more that the Russian Federation is very interested in long term cooperation with NAMMCO, and I hope that this cooperation will be develop.

I have a full agenda ahead of us during this week. I'm looking forward to a successful and productive work during this Meeting.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Opening Statement by IWC

Thank you Chair.

And good morning delegates, Secretariat, and Observers. I want to thank the NAMMCO Secretariat for inviting the IWC to attend this meeting in the beautiful Arctic city of Tromsø. My name is Rebecca Lent, and I recently joined the IWC as the Executive Secretary. This is my first NAMMCO meeting and also my first opportunity to officially represent the Secretariat, and I look forward to learning more about your Commission.

In an era of growing challenges from an ever-broader range of human impacts – bycatch, ship strikes, noise and other environmental hazards – we are all the more motivated to collaborate on our shared mission. Our staff and funding resources are unfortunately not growing as rapidly as these threats, at a time when we need even more science and other tools to ensure healthy marine mammal populations.

That's why I am pleased to highlight areas where NAMMCO and IWC are already collaborating and achieving excellent and practical results. With the guidance of the IWC Chair, Bureau and Contracting Governments, I look forward to working with my counterpart at NAMMCO, Dr. Desportes, to continue to explore areas for joint work. We all benefit tremendously from the synergy of combining the skills and expertise offered by our teams.

Collaboration between NAMMCO and IWC

Over the past few years, NAMMCO representatives have attended the IWC meeting, and this is the third NAMMCO Council meeting attended by the IWC Secretariat. Also, the Executive Secretary of NAMMCO recently attended entanglement training led by IWC's David Mattila and his Norwegian colleagues in Sortland, Norway. Both of our organizations are undergoing external reviews, and the IWC was pleased to be asked by NAMMCO to nominate a review panel member. Our 'overlap' is even greater when considering our common member delegations for Scientific Committee and Commission meetings, which we believe increases the effectiveness of our efforts.

Stock assessment science and data

We are fortunate to have considerable collaboration on the data collection/sharing and science of stock assessments for cetaceans, which form the fundamental basis for our missions. These common areas include cetacean survey methodology and design, estimating abundance and indices of abundance, and the provision of robust science-based conservation and management advice. One example is the co-operation on reviewing the abundance estimates and correction factors from recent Icelandic and Greenlandic surveys, with members of both Scientific Committees involved. Although our methods of providing management advice may differ, there is much common ground in the collection and sharing of data needed to assess relevant cetacean stocks. I hope that we can continue to build upon this collaboration to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure improved science.

Continuation of work on cetacean welfare

As with NAMMCO, the IWC scientists and technical experts are working on a programme that takes a holistic approach to cetacean welfare including both hunting and non-hunting related issues. A particular strength of the IWC's programme is its work to develop a global network to respond to entangled whales. The IWC large whale Expert Advisory Group is composed of virtually all of the most experienced entanglement responders and entanglement veterinarians

in the world. Through this network, training events have taken place in many countries, some of which are within NAMMCO's geographical remit. Indeed, since 2012 the training has reached around 1,000 people from over 40 countries. We are also planning an upcoming meeting of the Global Network that will focus largely on human safety, given the recent tragic accident in Canada. The IWC's welfare programme is now starting to look at issues arising from other factors such as ship strikes and therefore has commonalities with NAMMCO's proposal to establish a new committee on non-hunting related welfare issues. We also recognise the work undertaken by NAMMCO to improve killing techniques and the presentation on this by the NAMMCO Secretariat at the last IWC meeting.

Continued strengthening of the IWC's management of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling

The IWC ASW Working Group will meet in a few weeks in Barrow Alaska, with participation of a number of the delegates here at the NAMMCO meeting. This meeting will continue to review and implement the recommendations of the 2015 Maniitsoq Workshop, which also benefitted from NAMMCO participation. These recommendations address the IWC process for agreeing catch limits and the need to better communicate the description of the subsistence hunts. Continued cooperation with NAMMCO will be beneficial to successful implementation of these recommendations, which we believe are also relevant to NAMMCO's mission and work programme.

Bycatch Mitigation Initiative

Recognizing the impact of bycatch on marine mammal populations around the world, the IWC has expanded its work on fisheries bycatch with the recent launch of the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI). This has seen the recruitment of an IWC bycatch coordinator, and the initiative is currently setting up an Expert Panel, which will bring together wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary expertise on bycatch, from fisheries technologists to economists and will help advise the BMI in defining and implementing activities over the next few years. We thank the NAMMCO Secretariat for their nominations for the IWC Bycatch Expert Panel, which should be forthcoming soon. The initiative is currently examining the opportunities for collaboration, including with FAO, RFMOs and other IGOs and in defining the most strategically important activities to engage in. We would welcome discussion with NAMMCO's BYCELS Working Group, on how we could collaborate more closely on bycatch.

Marine Mammal Strandings

Marine mammal strandings is another area of shared interest between our respective organizations. The IWC has recently established a Strandings Initiative, supported by an Expert Panel and Stranding Coordinator that is pursuing work in a range of areas to help build capacity across our member governments for strandings response and investigation. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate and share expertise on this with our colleagues at NAMMCO.

Closing

In closing, I wish to reiterate our commitment to exploring, under the guidance of my leadership, where additional joint efforts on science and technical expertise can be beneficial to our organizations. While our mandates differ in important ways, NAMMCO and IWC might find it more effective when working together where possible and appropriate.

I look forward to meeting all of you and to learning from this meeting. Thank you again for your hospitality.

Joint Opening Statement by LIVIN and IWMC

This Statement is made on behalf of LIVIN and IWMC. Because of a conflict of schedule, Eugene Lapointe of IWMC, to his great dismay, is unable to attend NAMMCO26. He asked me to convey his warm and friendly regards to you Madam Chair, to the Secretary and her devoted staff and to his numerous friends involved in the NAMMCO Councils.

Madame Chair,

I was born and raised on a small and isolated sealing community in the middle of the Gulf of St-Lawrence, in eastern Canada.

From there, I have had a front row seat when animalist groups started their smear campaigns against our sealing activities. I've seen media playing the role of public relation machines for those extremists and I've witnessed weak politicians taking the side of multimillionaire US based groups and movie stars instead of protecting their own fragile communities.

I have seen all of them animalists, media and politicians disregarding both science and common sense, and I knew it was a recipe for disaster. Not only for the ecosystem, but also for small rural communities which fully depend on healthy and balanced ecosystem to thrive.

As every real conservationist projected, overprotected seals have overpopulated and now jeopardize the southern Gulf of St-Lawrence's ecosystem and the livelihood of its small coastal communities. Those already fragile communities are paying a high price for the emotionally driven anti-use philosophy sold by animalists to fill their deep pockets.

But if only we were the only victims of that dirty racket. Having less options than we have down south, many Inuit communities have paid in blood the "morally" justified bans on seal products.

And as activists' lies and deceptions worked for seal, why shouldn't they apply it to other charismatic species? Polar bear, elephant, rhino, whale, shark... let's make more money with those as well. We might have to trample on some more small communities who can hardly defend themselves, but who cares?

Well, the majority of us do. The majority of us wants wild resources management based on the best available data and taking into account its impacts on fragile rural communities.

It's unfortunately a very diverse and unorganized majority battling against a very motivated, organized and highly financed minority.

After attending many international meetings dealing with wild resources, my esteemed colleagues and I came to the sad conclusion that NAMMCO might be one of the last international organizations that still base its actions on rationales while considering those who, not only love Nature, but depend on it and try their best to live in harmony with it.

I sincerely hope LIVIN's and IWMC's experiences and expertise can contribute to NAMMCO's hard and crucial mission.

THANK YOU, MADAME CHAIR

Opening Statement by NTI

Madam Chair, Delegates, Observers, ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, we thank our hosts. It is a great pleasure to be in Norway and to participate in this meeting.

As many of you know, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated represents the Inuit in the Nunavut Settlement Area. The Nunavut Agreement was signed in 1993 by the Inuit of Nunavut and the Government of Canada and is protected by the Canadian Constitution.

Inuit rely on wildlife for subsistence, cultural and spiritual value. Inuit support utilization of wildlife through sound wildlife management. For Inuit, conserving wildlife is about ensuring that we can pass on traditions, knowledge and values to our children. In this regard, NTI appreciates recent efforts by NAMMCO members and the NAMMCO Secretariat to enhance research, education and management of marine mammals. We particularly appreciate the recent outreach efforts, such as the recent “Blue Economy” breakout session “Arctic sealing: threat or blue prospect?” that NAMMCO took the lead in organizing at the 2017 Arctic Circle Assembly, and that NTI co-arranged together with WWF Arctic Programme.

NTI has also participated in various NAMMCO workshops and Joint Working Groups and recognizes the important contribution of NAMMCO to the conservation of marine mammals. We also expect marine mammals to be affected as ship traffic increases and other changes occur in Nunavut. We look forward to working together to address existing and emerging challenges.

Thank-you,

Opening Statement by Makivik Corporation

Thank you the NAMMCO Secretariat for welcoming us to the 26th Meeting of the Commission in beautiful Tromso.

I am Adamie Delisle Alaku, executive VP of Makivik Corporation, responsible for renewable resources in Nunavik, Canada. I am here with Stas Olpinski, my Director of our Resource Development Department.

Makivik Corporation has been asking the Canadian Government for many years that they join NAMMCO as a member state in order to share knowledge and get involved in marine resources.

We are very pleased to have been accepted by NAMMCO to be accepted in an observer status capacity to represent Nunavik Inuit interests concerning marine mammals on which we rely.

We have a lot of vested interest regarding all our activities related in marine wildlife.

We believe that NAMMCO remains the appropriate and internationally respected organization dealing with management and research concerning marine mammals.

I would like to thank Genevieve for helping us coordinate obtaining observer status and look forward to learning from the members how you conduct your meetings.