



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUSES

6 March 2018, Tromsø, Norway

1. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair, Guðni Magnús Eiríksson, Iceland, was unable to attend and Nette Levermann, Greenland, had agreed to be acting chair for the meeting. Levermann opened the meeting and welcomed all participants.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda was adopted and the list of documents reviewed, both documents are contained in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEAL STOCKS

The Chair drew attention to the following documents:

- NAMMCO/26/MC/05 summarising past proposals for conservation and management and responses to these.
- NAMMCO/26/MC/06 summarising past requests to the Scientific Committee and responses.

The Chair of the Scientific Committee, Tore Haug, presented the information on seal and walrus stocks from the Scientific Committee report (NAMMCO/26/08) under each species.

3.1 Harp Seals

Review of requests by Council for advice from the Scientific Committee

R-2.1.4 - NAMMCO/12-2003 (standing): *to regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and hooded seals as new information becomes available.*

R-2.1.10 – NAMMCO/17-2008 (standing): *to provide advice on Total Allowable Catches for the management of harp seals and the establishment of a quota system for the common stocks between Norway and the Russian Federation.*

Update from Scientific Committee

A survey on pup production for both harp and hooded seals in the Greenland Sea is planned for March 2018

- An aerial survey was planned for the White Sea at the same time, but have now been postponed. The results of these surveys will be presented at the next ICES/NAFO/NAMMCO WGHARP meeting.
- Norwegian-Russian satellite-tagging of harp seals in the White Sea (part of Norwegian-Russian Research program on Harp seal Ecology) previously postponed due to economical constraints has secured the funding for 2018.

- Tagging of harp seals in the Greenland Sea is ongoing. Preliminary results appear to be similar to what was seen in adult seals in the 1990s, however the seals are moving further north of Svalbard now, likely due to change in ice conditions.
- A harp seal survey to estimate pup production of Northwestern Atlantic harp seals was flown during March 2017. Extensive reconnaissance was completed in the Gulf of St Lawrence (GSL) and off the east coast of Newfoundland (Front). There was very little ice in the GSL, and the estimated pup production in the southern GSL (approximately 28,000 animals) was much lower than the roughly 200,000 pups that are normally born in the southern GSL area.
- Ice was also poor at the Front, compared to traditional conditions, but was suitable for pupping. In 2017, older than expected pups were detected at the Front, and given their age, it was considered that these animals were actually pups produced by females from the GSL, who had moved from the GSL region to the front to have their young. These results will be discussed at the next ICES/NAFO/NAMMCO WGHARP meeting.
- The SC **recommended** that the WGHARP meeting be postponed to 2019 to allow for the analysis from the 2017 and 2018 surveys to be completed in time for the meeting.

Updates from Member Countries

Greenland informed on a change in annually average catches from 65.400 the last 5 years compared to an annually average of 81.000 previous 5 years.

Norway informed that in the West Ice the quota for 2017 was 26 000 harp seals (1+ animals or an equivalent number of pups where 2 pups equals one 1+ animal) and the catch was 1 033 1+ animals, including 7 animals taken for scientific purposes. One vessel participated in the hunt, and had an inspector onboard. No violations were reported. In the East Ice the Norwegian quota was 7000 animals, but there were no commercial catches as has been the case for the previous 8 years. One seal were taken for scientific purposes.

Conclusion

The Management Committee took note of the report from the Scientific Committee and **endorsed** the postponement of the WGHARP to 2019.

3.2 Hooded Seals

Review of requests by Council for advice from the Scientific Committee

R-2.1.4 - NAMMCO/12-2003 (standing): *to regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and hooded seals as new information becomes available.*

R-2.1.9 – NAMMCO/16-2007 (ongoing): *to investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline of the Greenland Sea stock of hooded seals; assess the status of the stock on basis of the results from the survey in 2007.*

Update from Scientific Committee

- Survey on pup production for hooded seals in the Greenland Sea planned for March 2018
- The results of this survey should be informative, as there should have been sufficient time since this stock of hooded seals were protected in 2007 to potentially see increases in pup production (if hunting was the cause of the decline).

- The SC **recommended** that the WGHARP meeting be postponed to 2019 to allow for the analysis from the 2017 and 2018 surveys to be completed in time for the meeting.

Updates from Member Countries

Greenland reported on a change annual average catches from 1,700 animals the last 5 years as compared to an annually average of 2,400 the previous 5 years.

Greenland also reiterate last year's request that it be stated more clearly that the SC advice to only allow a research catch from the East Greenland stock does also allow for the small subsistence hunt taking place from two settlements. This was confirmed by the chair of the SC.

Norway informed that 17 hooded seals were taken for scientific purposes in 2017.

Conclusion

The Management Committee took note of the report from the Scientific Committee and **endorsed** that the WGHARP be postponed to 2019.

3.3 Ringed Seals

Review of requests by Council for advice from the Scientific Committee

R-2.3.1- NAMMCO/5-1995 (ongoing): *to advise on stock identity, assess abundance in each stock area, long-term effects on stocks by present removals in each stock area, effects of recent environmental changes (i.e. disturbance, pollution) and changes in the food supply, and interactions with other marine living resources.*

R-2.3.2 - NAMMCO/7-1997 (ongoing): *to advice 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.*

Update from Scientific Committee

- Updates on tagging studies which start to show the contours of stock delineations had been discussed. This suggests that in the near future it will be possible to make management units for ringed seals. Additionally, a genetics study which involves samples from many different areas is ongoing and will hopefully also inform on stock structure of ringed seals. At SC/23, the SC had **recommended** more satellite telemetry and collection of samples for genetics to inform on possible stock structure in Greenland, and across the Arctic. The SC therefore welcomed this new tracking information and looked forward to the genetics results.
- The SC decided that more results from the ongoing studies are still needed before a Ringed Seal WG meeting should be convened, and the suggested timing is 2020/2021. It could also be a useful venture to expand the WG to other researchers outside of the NAMMCO countries, in particular Canada.
- It was also suggested that this meeting could occur in combination with a Bearded Seal WG, as many of the same researchers would be involved in both meetings.

Updates from Member Countries

Norway informed that there had not been reports from the Svalbard area for many years and that this would be rectified in the future. Furthermore, Norway informed that 16 ringed seals had been reported taken in the coastal hunt and 29 ringed seals in the Svalbard area in 2017.

Greenland informed on a change in annual average catches from 59,200 last 5 years as compared to an annually average of 66,300 the previous 5 years. It was noted that the change could be because of reduced trading opportunities of pelts (decreased prices) and also negative changing sea ice conditions.

The hunter representative from Greenland, Mr. Jens Danielsen, gave a statement on his more than 40 years of experience as hunter, describing hunting methods for different seasons and species, some reflected in regulations other by tradition, the utilisation of the seals including conservation methods and productions were described. He also informed about the severe implications on hunting and income possibilities experienced due to climate change and EU regulations.

The observer from Nunavut confirmed the climate change consequences described by the Greenlandic hunter. He also drew attention to possible consequences of climate change on polar bear stocks and what this would mean for ringed seals.

Comments and Discussion by the MCSW

The chair drew attention to recommendations that had been presented last year and asked if the MCSW could endorse these. (NAMMCO/26/MC/05):

- Satellite telemetry and collection of samples for genetics [GR]
- Convene a Ringed seal WG (possibly in conjunction with a Bearded Seal WG) in 2020/2021.

Conclusion

The Management Committee took note of the report from the Scientific Committee and **endorsed** the recommendations noted above.

3.4 Grey Seals

Review of requests by Council for advice from the Scientific Committee

R-2.4.2 - NAMMCO/11-2002 (standing): *provide a new assessment of grey seal stocks throughout the North Atlantic.*

Update from Scientific Committee

In preparation for a planned Coastal Seals Working Group (CSWG) in 2019, the SC had heard updates from Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands on the progress of addressing the recommendations from the 2016 CSWG meeting. These updates are included under item 8.4.3 in the SC/24 report (NAMMCO/26/08).

Grey seals are removed around aquaculture farms in the Faroes. The Faroes should develop a written monitoring plan that includes regular assessments. A survey of the total population of grey seals in the Faroe Islands is planned for summer 2018.

The SC had emphasised that it has been 15 years since the SC first expressed concern regarding grey seals in the Faroe Islands, thus **recommended** that this work be given a high priority.

Updates from Member Countries

Faroe Islands informed that the 1st priority is the summer survey 2018 and the intention to

deploy as many of the 8 available tags as possible on grey seals. The remaining recommendations will be taken step by step afterwards.

Responding to a question on utilisation of killed grey seals FO informed that it used to be some in the past but not anymore. FO also informed that the law regulating fish farming is being revised and one new aspect will be that killing of seals by fish farmers must be reported. This is expected to improve the reporting procedure so that more data will be available.

Norway informed that the quota in 2017 was 210 animals of which 81 animals were reported taken.

Comments and Discussion by the MCSW

The chair drew attention to 2 recommendations from SC:

- Research recommendations for Faroe Islands from CSWG in 2016 should be given a high priority. [FO]
- Also at SC/23- More frequent surveys, particularly in the areas of decline. [NO]

Conclusion

The Management Committee took note of the report from the Scientific Committee, and the updates from the member countries and **endorsed** the recommendations noted above.

3.5 Harbour Seals

Review of requests by Council for advice from the Scientific Committee

R-2.5.2: conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour seals as soon as feasible

R-2.5.2 - NAMMCO/16-2007 modified **NAMMCO/19-2010** (pending): *To conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour seals around Iceland and Norway as soon as feasible.*

Update from Scientific Committee

In preparation for a planned CSWG in 2019, Norway and Iceland had provided the SC with updates on their responses to the recommendations of the CSWG that occurred in 2016. These updates are included under item 8.4.3 in the SC/24 report (NAMMCO/26/08).

Updates from Member Countries

Norway reported that in the coastal hunt the quota was 454 of which 388 animals had been reported taken.

Greenland informed that the small number of reported catches are presently being validated by the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources.

Iceland clarified that there is no discontinuing of effort on the issue of tourism effect on stocks, rather there is no increased efforts but what has already been initiated will be continued.

Conclusion

The Management Committee took note of the report from the Scientific Committee and updates from member countries.

3.6 Bearded Seal

There are no requests for advice for bearded seals.

Update from Scientific Committee

At SC/23, the SC **recommended** a future working group on bearded seals. The SC recommended that such a working group could be combined with a Ringed Seal Working Group, as many of the same researchers would be involved in both meetings. This combined meeting could be held in 2020.

The chair of the SC noted that this is an ice-dependent seal species.

Updates from Member Countries

Greenland informed on an annual average change in catches from 1,250 the last 5 years as compared to an annually average of 1,400 the previous 5 years.

Norway informed that 23 animals had been reported taken in the Svalbard area.

Comments and Discussion by the MCSW

The chair informed that last year's meeting had noted the idea of holding a Bearded Seal WG, and that now there was a recommendation to combine it with a Ringed Sea WG.

Conclusion

The Management Committee took note of the report from the Scientific Committee and **endorsed** the recommendation to convene a WG combined with a Ringed Seal WG in 2020/2021.

3.7 Walrus

Review of requests by Council for advice from the Scientific Committee

R-2.6.3 (ongoing): effects of human disturbance, including fishing and shipping activities, in particular scallop fishing, on the distribution, behaviour and conservation status of walrus in West Greenland.

R-2.6.7 (pending): The SC is requested to provide assessments of, and advice on sustainable removals from, all stocks of walrus in Greenland covering the period from 2019 to 2023, with the advice for Qaanaaq starting in 2021.

R-1.6.4 (ongoing): The SC has recommended that catch statistics include correction for struck but lost animals for different seasons, areas, and catch operations. Council requested the SC and the Committee on Hunting Methods to provide advice on the best methods for collection of the desired statistics on losses.

R-1.6.5 (standing): Greenland requests that struck and loss rates are subtracted from future advice on sustainable removals in Greenland, with the advice being given as total allowable landings.

Update from Scientific Committee

A Walrus Working Group is planned for fall 2018, which will allow for the results of a survey planned for the Qaanaaq area (Baffin Bay stock) in spring 2018 to be available to the meeting, and it will also allow for updated catch advice to be given in time for the new quota block (2019-2024).

In northeast Greenland, two surveys were carried out in 2017, results not yet available, Genetics show that walrus from Svalbard-Franz Josef and Pechora Sea are different. In Canada an aerial survey to count walrus was flown Hudson Bay –Davis Strait in September.

Rob Stewart (DFO, retired) will be the new Chair of this working group, and it was encouraged to have participation of Canadian scientists and the Canadian catch data, as there is a shared stock between Canada and Greenland.

Updates from Member Countries

Greenland informed on:

The 2018 quotas:

West Greenland: 69

Northwater: 85

East Greenland: 18

All three stocks are following the advice given from the NAMMCO SC. It was noted that it set the stage for a positive NDF statement in 2017

Catch including Struck & Lost in 2017

West Greenland: 35

Northwater: 73

East Greenland: 3

As noted above this is a shared stock between Greenland and Canada. It was noted that although the last WG did not have Canadian participation, catch statistics had been received. The observer from Canada informed that he would discuss internally possible Canadian participation.

Comments and Discussion by the MCSW

The Chair noted that the WWG will take R-2.6.7, 1.6.4, and 1.6.5 as their main ToR, and will discuss if there is any new information for an answer to R-2.6.3 (which was addressed as much as feasible at the Disturbance Symposium).

MCSW was informed that the advice from the WG will be dealt with by the SC at their meeting in November 2018. Greenland can implement this advice prior to endorsement by the MCSW in 2019, although if Greenland wishes to have the endorsement prior to 2019, the MCSW can endorse the advice intersessionally via correspondence.

Conclusion

The Management Committee took note of the report from the Scientific Committee.

4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The chairmanship was up for election. Iceland has held the chairmanship in 2017 and 2018 and Norway will hold the chairmanship for the next 2-year period.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no issues raised under this agenda item.