

**NAMMCO**



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

**REPORT**

**6 MARCH 2018**

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**MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUSES**  
**6 March 2018, Tromsø, Norway**  
**Report**

**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 to the meeting of the Management Committee for Seals and Walruses (MCSW).

**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
- NAMMCO/26/08 "Report of the 24<sup>th</sup> Scientific Committee"

The Chair of the Scientific Committee, Tore Haug, presented the information on seal and walrus stocks from the Scientific Committee report under each species.

**3.1 Harp Seals**

**Review of requests by Council for advice from the Scientific Committee**

- **R-2.1.4-2003** (standing): *to regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and hooded seals as new information becomes available*
- **R-2.1.10-2008** (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-2.1.4-2003** (standing): *to regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and hooded seals as new information becomes available.*
- **R-2.1.9-2007** (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 if 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-2.3.1-1995** (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-2.3.2-1997** (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 (appendix 3) 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 (GL)
- 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-2.4.2-2002** (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 1<sup>st</sup> 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-2.5.2-2007** 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-2.6.3-2006** (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-2.6.7-2017** (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-1.6.4-2016** (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-1.6.5-2017** (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 walruses from Svalbard-Franz Josef and Pechora Sea are different. In Canada an aerial survey to count walruses 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 working group 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).

The Management Committee 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.



**Appendix 1 - Agenda**

| <b>AGENDA ITEMS</b>  | <b>DOCUMENT REFERENCE</b>   |
|--|---|
| <b>1. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS</b>                           |   |
| <b>2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA</b>                                   | NAMMCO/26/MC/03   |
| <b>3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEAL STOCKS</b> | NAMMCO/26/MC/05<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06<br>NAMMCO/26/08  |
| 3.1 Harp Seals   | NAMMCO/26/08, item 7.1<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06, R-2.1.4, R-2.1.10<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/05                     |
| 3.2 Hooded Seals   | NAMMCO/26/08, item 7.2<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06, R-2.1.4, 2.1.9<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/05                        |
| 3.3 Ringed Seals   | NAMMCO/26/08, item 7.3<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06, R-2.3.1 - 2.3.2<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/05                       |
| 3.4 Grey Seals   | NAMMCO/26/08, item 7.4<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06, R-2.4.2<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/05                               |
| 3.5 Harbour Seals  | NAMMCO/26/08, item 7.5<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06, R-2.5.2<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/05                               |
| 3.6 Bearded Seal   | NAMMCO/26/08, item 7.6<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/05  |
| 3.7 Walrus   | NAMMCO/26/08, item 7.7<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/06, R-2.6.3, R-2.6.7,<br>R-1.6.4, R-1.6.5<br>NAMMCO/26/MC/05 |
| <b>4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS</b>                                 |   |
| <b>5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>                                   |   |

**Appendix 2 – Joint list of documents for the Management Committees**

| <b>Document no</b> | <b>Title</b>   | <b>Agenda item</b> |
|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| NAMMCO/26/MC/01    | Joint List of Documents for the Management Committees  |                    |
| NAMMCO/26/MC/02    | Draft Agenda MCJ   |                    |
| NAMMCO/26/MC/03    | Draft Agenda MCSW  |                    |
| NAMMCO/26/MC/04    | Draft Agenda MCC   |                    |
| NAMMCO/26/MC/05    | Recent proposals for Conservation and Management and research recommendations                                | MCJ, MCC, MCSW     |
| NAMMCO/26/MC/06    | Summary of Requests by NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, and Responses by the Scientific Committee | MCJ, MCC, MCSW     |
| NAMMCO/26/08       | Report of the 24th meeting of the Scientific Committee   | MCJ, MCC, MCSW     |

### **Appendix 3 – Statement by Jens Danielsen, KNAPK, Hunter’s and Fishermen’s organization of Greenland**

#### **Seals. Harp seals. Bearded seals. Hooded seals. How they are hunted. An explanation of how their meat and skins are used and finally some information on climate change.**

Seals such as harp seals, bearded seals and hooded seals and how they are hunted play an important part in Greenland, with having meat to eat and skins to make clothes from, and they will be important for all time, because we cannot do without them in the Arctic. As our country is vast the way in which seals are hunted varies. In places where there is sea ice they are hunted on the ice, in places with ice-free waters they are hunted in the water by larger vessels. And some municipalities in Greenland demand that it is banned to hunt seals in the summertime when there is no more ice on the sea and seals lose their fur and get thin until September when the seals get their coat back and fatten up again and you can hunt them again.

When seals are hunted on water, dinghies or larger vessels follow the movements of the seal and when they are successful it is shot. Seals are hunted on new ice, which has no snow on it, by walking on the ice and listening for the sound of a seal’s breath, and when you hear it, bear skin is tied to the soles of your shoes to muffle their sound as you walk closer to the seal breathing hole. When you reach it, you shoot the seal with a 30.06 and harpoon it so that it will not sink and be lost. In the spring when the seals are out of the water and resting on the ice catching some sun, seals are hunted with blinds – that is a small frame with white fabric stretched across it. A rifle is tied to such a blind and the hunter bellies his way closer to the seal until he is close enough to take a shot. The seal is shot through the head, killing it instantly. If a seal is struck anywhere else, they will get off the ice and will be lost never to be seen again. For that type of hunting you use ammunition 222, 223 and 243. Bearded seals tend to rest on ice floes, broken ice and at the edges of icebergs. Harp seals tend to rest on ice floes. Hooded seals tend to rest on pack ice and on top of smaller icebergs.

In the winter and during the polar night seals are hunted by dogsled with dogs that have experience with hunting and have a good nose for finding a seal breathing hole. And areas with broken ice are searched for, as seals tend to use these as breathing holes as well. Nets made for seals are also put to good use during the polar night as aid for sustenance. Seals are also hunted close to the ice, from floes and from land; when the seal appears it is shot, and if you cannot retrieve the seal with hooks it is retrieved with aid from a kayak or a small boat. And that is how bearded seals, harp seals and hooded seals are hunted.

In Greenland the skins from these hunts are well needed for making clothes and for other uses. Seal skins are used for a variety of things, for instance, the fur is removed and set to dry in the cold for use in womens’ and girls’ footwear, and when the fur is removed and set to dry in a warm place it is used for mens’ and boys’ footwear. It is also used with the fur on for both womens’ and mens’ footwear as well as gloves as soon as it is dry. It is also used for outerwear and outer anoraks in the cold, in addition to being used as fabric for kayaks, and bladders on hunting tools. Seal skin is used for the kayaking anorak and for the tips of whips and to hold fermented little auks.

Skins from harp seals are used as any other seal skin, but are especially used for the soles of footwear, for children and for the skin of kayaks. Skins from hooded seals are used for many different things just like other skins. Skins from bearded seals are often used for the soles of footwear and as rope (for whips), because it is thicker compared to other skins. Seal skins and skins from harp seals are also processed to be sold to Great Greenland which freezes and later tans the skin to finalize it as a product.

All of the meat from the seals mentioned are eaten or prepared for storing for future use. Seals and harp seals are covered by stones and stored whole to mature in flavor, and the meat is later eaten boiled, frozen or dried during celebrations and feasts.

Meat from bearded seals and hooded seals are also prepared for winter stock. People in northern areas often dry the meat of bearded seals for winter stock, cooking uses and dog feed. People from South Greenland primarily make winter stock and other delicious foods out of hooded seal. The methods for cutting up the seal and preparing the skin varies from place to place.

In recent years there has not been a lot of snow in Northern Greenland due to climate changes, and as a result baby seals (meqqortut) are visible on bare ice during the birthing season, before when there was more snow, they used to stay hidden under the snow (nunarsak).

Because of climate change the seals arrive much later into the fjords and are getting more absent. Greenland as a whole is experiencing more heavy storms which tend to last longer, and that is because of climate change. Traditional weather prediction methods can no longer be used as winds tend to come suddenly without the usual precursors. It used to be that people could predict the weather by knowing what to look for, but this is no longer possible in recent years.

In places of Greenland where there is sea-ice, the sea ice has gotten thinner for more than half of the season. Specialists have said that a warm current has reached the Northern parts of Greenland which has caused the sea-ice to become much thinner. Where the sea-ice has usually been more than 2 meters thick at a certain time of the year it is now less than 1 meter thick, and finally, the sea-ice season starts more than a month later than usual.

Greenland has gotten hotter in the summer and the summer rain in North Greenland has dramatically increased.

Jens Danielsen

Kalaallit nunaani Aalisartut Piniartut *Kattuffiat (KNAPK)*

*Hunter's and Fishermen's organization of Greenland*