

NAMMCO



WORKING GROUP ON BY-CATCH, ENTANGLEMENTS AND LIVE STRANDINGS

*25 February 2021
Online meeting*

REPORT



Harbour porpoise in gillnet © Krzysztof Skóra-Hel Marine Station

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SUMMARY

The NAMMCO Council Working Group on By-catch, Entanglements and Live Strandings (BYCELS) met online 25 February 2021. Present were Guðni Magnus Eiríksson (Chair) (Iceland), Ulla Svarrer Wang (Faroe Islands), Sofie Abelsen and Jesper Ødegaard Jakobsen (Greenland), Guro Gjelsvik, Kathrine A. Ryeng and Hild Ynnesdal (Norway), and Charlotte Winsnes from the Secretariat.

Actions arising from the meetings:

The Secretariat and the Chair:

Investigate if there is a basis for conducting a summary of the data or analysis of some sort from the existing database and also what would be required to make interactive maps.

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND REVIEWING DOCUMENTS

The Chair Guðni Magnus Eiríksson opened the meeting, the agenda was adopted and the meeting documents reviewed (Appendix 1).

2. ANNUAL REPORTING FROM MEMBERS

NAMMCO/Database-2020 contained the database up to and including the year 2020. The reporting followed the new guidelines adopted by Council in 2019.

The Working Group reviewed the submitted data from 2020 from member countries on by-catch, entanglements and strandings.

By-catch

The classification of by-catch versus entrapment and entanglement was briefly discussed. However, in line with previous decisions it was agreed to continue to use the term by-catch for small cetaceans and seals, and entanglement for entrapped large cetaceans.

The Faroe Islands informed that there had been no reported by-catch in 2020 from the electronic logbooks. This was explained with gillnets not being allowed in near coast fishing operations. The monkfish and Greenland halibut fisheries take place deeper than 380 meters depth and deeper than 500 meters depth outside of the harbour porpoises and seals habitat area. Questioned on the reliability of the reported 0 by-catch, it was informed that in order to confirm the reported data, various independent observer data, collected by inspectors and through scientific surveys, have been reviewed by the Faroe Marine Research Institute.

Greenland noted that the by-catch numbers for 2020 were being collated and would be reported later. The meeting commented on the high number of by-caught harp seals and underlined the importance of getting more information on the type of gear and fishery involved. Greenland informed that the fishermen only report on numbers not on fishery or gear. BYCELS urged Greenland to include questions on gear and fishery in the reporting forms.

Norway commented that the submitted information on by-catch came from electronic logbooks, and that it was anticipated that the numbers were highly underreported. Estimates of by-caught harbour porpoises are around 2500 – 3000 animals and as such are topping the list of by-caught animals in Norway. To solve this problem a new regulation has been approved requiring fishermen to use pingers in the gillnet fisheries in Vestfjorden as a start. 2021 is the first year of the regulation with a focus on instructing and aiding fishermen in deploying the new equipment rather than compliance. The Institute of Marine Research will however carry out a study in 2021 in Vestfjorden to monitor the effects. Vestfjorden is thought to be a hot spot for harbour porpoises, and the use of pingers as a mitigation tool has been shown to be successful in other countries.

Iceland noted that it is an ongoing task to get better information on actual by-catch. It would also be interesting to know if the trend is that reporting from fishermen is improving.

Entanglement

No entanglements were reported from the Faroe Islands. Iceland informed that three humpback whales had been reported as entangled. Greenland reported on four humpback whales of which one disappeared, two were killed and the last was found dead. In Norway two humpback whales were released from a purse seine by the fishermen, one humpback whale was disentangled by the Coastguard, one bowhead whale was found dead and one humpback whale self-released, while one entangled pilot whale was reported but not found again.

Norway noted that, probably because of the disentanglement courses held and the generally increased awareness of the animal welfare issues related to entanglement and entrapment in recent years, more successful disentanglement stories surfaced. Entrapped animals in purse seine are being released by fishermen and qualified personnel from the Directorate of Fisheries or the Coast Guard take direct action to disentangle animals.

Strandings

Greenland did not report on any stranding events.

Iceland reported several incidents of stranded animals and 1 mass stranding of 10 pilot whales was observed.

The Faroe Islands reported that there had been two stranding events and that the meat of the 11 northern bottlenose whales had been distributed among the inhabitants of the nearby villages.

Norway reported several incidents of stranded animals, based on information given to the Institute of Marine Research. The strandings of several sperm whales and other large whales in the Lofoten area in the spring 2020 were highlighted.

The Chair concluded this agenda item noting that all data had been reviewed, some follow-up clarifications were identified, and no analysis had yet been carried out of the data material currently collected.

He also noted the inherent randomness of the stranding- and entanglement incidents and thus the data collected but suggested, that over time it might be interesting to see if the data showed some sort of pattern. Generally, it was pointed out that the suitability of the different data categories would always be up for discussion should time show that some were redundant or misleading.

3. FUTURE WORK OF BYCELS

The Chair had called for this agenda item and the discussion had previously been postponed in order for all member countries to be represented. In the annotation it had been noted that the focus would be to identify what kind of issues member countries have with regards to animal welfare issues related to by-catch, entanglement and live stranding.

The Chair recalled the Terms of reference for BYCELS:

- 1) *The Working Group shall upon request from the Council or individual member countries, provide advice on welfare issues related to by-catch, entanglement, and live strandings, affecting marine mammals. The Working Group shall ensure that such advice is based on the best available scientific findings, technological developments and traditional knowledge, with due consideration given to safety requirements for humans*
- 2) *Members of the Working Group may raise specific questions for discussion during meetings of the Working Group. The Working Group may make proposals to the Council for specific tasks to undertake within its terms of reference*

- 3) *Non-member governments with observer status in NAMMCO may request advice from the Working Group through the Council*
- 4) *The Committee may seek outside expertise if it considers this necessary and appropriate.*

BYCELS was established as a response to the growing concern for the animal welfare aspects related to non-hunting anthropogenic threats to marine mammals. By-catch being the single largest killer of marine mammals worldwide was at the core of concerns, but also entangled and entrapped animals and live strandings. For dead stranded animals it would be interesting if one might be able to deduct information on why or how they stranded and died. From the beginning it was acknowledged that issues related to the extent of by-catch belonged to the existing Scientific Working Group on By-Catch and would not be addressed specifically by this WG.

Established in 2018 the WG agreed to:

- Make an overview of the extent of bycatch, entanglement and disentanglement and live strandings, including dead strandings in the member countries.
- Review existing guidelines (IWC, ASCOBANS and others) on by-catch, including entanglement and disentanglement and live strandings with the aim of identifying procedures and actions for recommendation to NAMMCO.
- Cooperate with and inform relevant network of the existence of BYCELS.

Looking back the WG agreed that it had accomplished what it initially had set out to do as summarised above. The annual reporting from member countries now encompassed data on by-catch, entanglement and strandings. A lot of work had been put into identifying and standardising relevant data to inform the work of BYCELS.

BYCELS has developed guidelines on how to euthanise stranded cetaceans. The guidelines which were finalised in 2019 will be forwarded to the Council in March 2021 (postponed 1 year due to COVID-19). The guidelines build on the 2017 Norwegian guidelines “Dyrevelferdsmessig forsvarlig håndtering av levende strandet hval, hval i oppdrettsmerder og hval viklet inn i fiskeredskaper i sjøen”.

BYCELS has reviewed existing protocols and guidelines on sampling of stranded animals and recommends that member countries use the most recent recognised protocol. Attention was drawn to the 2019 ASCOBANS report “Best practice on cetacean post-mortem investigations and tissue sampling”.

BYCELS has reviewed stranding response networks and has made guidelines on how to set up national response network.

On the issue of making guidelines for disentanglement, the WG agreed to not develop such. It was a concern that the existence of guidelines might prompt untrained personnel to try to disentangle animals themselves. This would represent a very high risk to human lives, and it might also worsen the situation for the entangled animal.

Discussing future work the member countries did not identify any new tasks or issues to be addressed. It was underlined that a lot of work had gone into streamlining the annual data reporting from members. As noted under agenda item 2 no analysis had been attempted, and it might be that analysis will require information over a longer timeframe than what is currently available for some of the areas.

It was proposed that it would be interesting to visualise the information and develop interactive maps.

The Chair in cooperation with the Secretariat agreed to investigate if there is a basis for conducting analysis of some sort from the existing database and also what would be required to make interactive maps.

With the understanding that a working group as compared to a committee meets when there is a request for its advice and not necessarily on a pre-set regular basis, and in line with its Terms of

Reference, BYCELS will continue to meet annually to review the reported data from members. Otherwise BYCELS will await instructions on issues to address at the discretion of the Council and member countries.

BYCELS emphasised that animal welfare issues related to by-catch, entanglement and strandings most probably would only increase in the future and it was therefore very important for NAMMCO to have a competent body addressing these questions.

4. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be scheduled after the submission of 2021 data, sometime in February 2022.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

6. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

The report was adopted by correspondence on 3 March 2021.

APPENDIX 1: Agenda and list of documents

AGENDA

1. ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS
2. ANNUAL REPORTING FROM MEMBERS
3. FUTURE WORK OF BYCELS
4. NEXT MEETING
5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

NAMMCO/BYCELS-2021-01/01 Draft annotated agenda and list of documents
NAMMCO/BYCELS-2020-01/02 Memo from the Secretariat on the database and
future of BYCELS
NAMMCO/Database-2020 NAMMCO database