



North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission

28th Annual Meeting - 22-25 March 2021

Press Release



Sustainable whaling and sealing in the North Atlantic: Regular scientific monitoring and close regional collaboration are key

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission held its 28th Annual Meeting online this week to consider issues related to the conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic.

Sustainable harvesting of marine mammals for food defines NAMMCO and unites the member countries - the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway - who all share a strong commitment to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 – to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

The Governments of Canada, Denmark, Japan, the Russian Federation and the USA were also represented in an observer capacity at the meeting, together with a number of international organisations, all of which follow the work of NAMMCO and share information with the Commission.

- **Over 30 years of whale sightings surveys continue with NASS 2024**

To provide the best possible scientific basis for sustainable management, NAMMCO and its members have generated a wealth of information on marine mammal distribution, trends in abundance, behaviour and ecology in the North Atlantic over more than 30 years, and will continue to do so in the decades ahead.

NASS – the North Atlantic Sightings Surveys for cetaceans – are a series of internationally coordinated surveys conducted in the North Atlantic since 1987, with follow-up surveys in 1989, 1995, 2001, 2007 and 2015. The next in the series is planned for 2024.

Volume 11 of the NAMMCO Scientific Publications series, “Sightings Surveys in the North Atlantic: 30 years of counting whales”, [published in 2020](#), provides up-to-date abundance estimates and 30-year trends in abundance for key whale populations, based on data collected from these surveys. This is fundamental to knowledge about whale stocks in the North Atlantic.

- **“Super Tag” for tracking whales to be developed**

Through its Scientific Committee, NAMMCO is involved in developing new tools for studying movement patterns, habitat selection and changes in occurrence of whales in the North Atlantic. NAMMCO members will be supporting plans to develop a new satellite tag that allows long-term tracking of fast-moving whale species, and which can be adapted to smaller whales, such as minke whales, for which

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tracking data is scarce. Japan has also expressed its willingness to support the project, which aims to provide new technology that can enhance knowledge about the movement of whales in all ocean regions of the world.

- **International Observation in 2022 to focus on hunting in West Greenland**

The NAMMCO Observation Scheme, which provides a mechanism for ensuring international oversight of hunting regulations in member countries, has recently been revised to ensure greater efficiency. After a few years with no observation in the field, activities will be considerably expanded in 2022, with plans for three observers appointed through NAMMCO to observe hunts of walrus, narwhal and beluga hunts in West Greenland, reporting back to NAMMCO's Committee on Inspection and Observation.

- **Showcasing marine mammals as food**

NAMMCO has endorsed a proposal from the Faroe Islands to organise an international conference on marine mammals as sustainable food resources. With a basis in the 2017 report produced by NAMMCO, "Marine Mammals – a Multifaceted Resource", the event focus on the economic, nutritional and cultural value of marine mammals. It will also bring together chefs from whaling and sealing countries to showcase how marine mammals are used in different food cultures, and to discuss the potential for more creative and innovative use of sustainable marine mammal produce in modern gastronomy, such as New Nordic Cuisine.

- **Including local and hunters' knowledge in management advice**

At the meeting hunters from East Greenland gave a presentation on the conservation status of narwhal in East Greenland, based on the hunters' extensive knowledge, gathered through decades of observations and experience. Their presentation underlines a divergence in viewpoints between scientists and hunters on the conservation status of narwhal in East Greenland. NAMMCO agreed that its management advice should be based on the best available knowledge and that this required a balanced inclusion of knowledge from both hunters and scientists. Further work will therefore be carried out to strengthen the inclusion of knowledge from hunters and users in the development of scientific research and management advice.

NAMMCO's Committee on Hunting Methods has always acknowledged the importance of including user knowledge. Hunters and other experts participate in Workshops and Expert Group meetings. The Committee provides a forum for sharing experiences and best practices and discussing improvements to hunting methods, in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

- **New Proposals for Conservation and Management**

The following conservation and management recommendations were agreed:

- An upper limit of 21,172 **harp seals** annually from the White Sea/Barents Sea stock and of 11,548 harp seals from the from the Greenland Sea stock,
- An annual landed catch of no more than 37 **belugas** from the North Water stock (north of Cape York) and 265 belugas from the West Greenland stock (south of Cape York - north of 65°),
- An annual landed catch of no more than 1,869 **harbour porpoises** for West Greenland.

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About NAMMCO: see www.nammco.org

NAMMCO is an international organisation for regional consultation and cooperation on the conservation, rational management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic, dealing with small and large whales as well as seals and walruses.

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