



NORTH ATLANTIC MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

Joint Meeting of the Management Committees

9 February 2016, Oslo, Norway

DRAFT REPORT

1. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair, Ulla Svarrer Wang (Faroe Islands), welcomed the members and observers to the Joint Session of the Management Committees.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without revisions (Appendix X).

The Chair drew the attention of the JMC to the list of documents (doc #).

3. APPOINTMENT OF RAPPORTEUR

Jill Prewitt from the Secretariat acted as rapporteur, with help from participants as needed.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS

4.1. Disturbance symposium¹

The Symposium organized by NAMMCO and titled “Impacts of Human Activities on Arctic Marine Mammals” which was held this past October 2015 in Copenhagen. This Symposium was organized to address requests from Greenland and the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee (R-2.6.3 and 3.4.9... *provide advice on the effects of human disturbance, including noise and shipping activities, on the distribution, behaviour and conservation status of belugas, narwhals (and walrus) particularly in West Greenland.*)

The organizer’s report was available to the Joint MC, however the Chair reminded the MC that although they will consider its contents, the report was not yet available to the Scientific Committee at their meeting in November 2015. However, Mads Peter Heide-Jørgensen, SC Convenor for the Symposium, informed the SC orally about a few issues of concern, in particular the Mary River mining project. Based on this, the SC noted that these industrial activities would likely have impact on the hunting of several marine mammal species in the area.

¹ NAMMCO Symposium “Impacts of Human Disturbance on Arctic Marine Mammals” 13-15 October 2015

Although the SC will provide their comments later, the report highlights a number of concerns for the potential for impacts from human activities on many marine mammals in the Arctic, specifically for belugas, narwhals, and walrus, but possibly other marine mammals such as bowhead whales and ringed seals.

The MC noted the report, and acknowledges that there appear to be reason for concern for human activities negatively affecting marine mammals in the Arctic. Therefore the MC asked the SC to fully consider the report at their 2016 meeting and provide comments in their next annual report.

4.2. Mary river project – Baffinland

Mads Peter Heide-Jørgensen, from the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, and one of the organizers of the Disturbance Symposium, provided an update on a specific project that was brought up at the Symposium. Concerns were raised at both the Symposium and the SC meeting about a Canadian mining project currently under development in the Canadian Arctic, the Mary River Project operated by Baffinland Iron Mines Corp, a project that continues expanding, currently with the prospect of year-round shipping through the heavy pack ice in Baffin Bay. It will have severe consequences for the large numbers of marine mammals using the area in summer and winter, not only narwhals but also belugas, bowheads, ringed seals and walruses, with unpredictable consequences for the populations themselves but also for the accessibility to hunting and/or its sustainability.

Initial approval was obtained in December 2012 for shipping 18 million tons of iron ore from a port in northern Foxe Basin through Hudson Strait. But due to the high costs of this operation approval was obtained in 2014 for shipping a smaller amount (4.2 mill tons) of iron ore from Milne Inlet on the east coast of Baffin Island through Baffin Bay during the open water season. A new alternative proposal has been prepared involving shipment of 12 million tons iron ore through Eclipse Sound and Baffin Bay for 10 months including winter icebreaking in the Baffin Bay.

The area in Milne Inlet that is planned to be the port of the ore shipping activity is located at one of the most important summering grounds for narwhals. Narwhals are known to be skittish, highly sensitive to human activities and easily disturbed by approaching boats, even in areas without hunting. Studies at the ice edge in Lancaster Sound have demonstrated that narwhals react at long distances to underwater noise from vessels, with and without icebreaking (Finley et al. 1990). The risk is that the narwhals may abandon the summering ground in Milne Inlet with unpredictable consequences for the population.

Of even larger concern is the prospect of year-round shipping through the heavy pack ice in Baffin Bay. Large numbers of marine mammals rely on the quiet pack-ice environment during winter. Bowhead whales are crossing Baffin Bay both in early winter and in spring where they congregate just outside the entrance to Eclipse Sound, the main shipping area for the iron ore transportation. Belugas also seasonally cross Baffin Bay and in winter they are found in large numbers in West Greenland precisely in the shipping lane. Narwhals from all of the Baffin Bay populations winter in various areas of Baffin Bay over deep water or along the West Greenland where they forage for most of their annual food intake. Shipping in these areas will not only create unprecedented underwater noise in otherwise very quiet environments, but it will also create artificial ice-free channels that may be used by several species of marine mammals with likely detrimental consequences.

Comments by the MC

Greenland was pleased to be informed about the project and raised the question of whether it was possible yet to say how much negative impact it will have on narwhal stock if the project continues. Heide-Jørgensen answered that it is not possible yet to make a total assessment of the impact, and this would be quite a challenging task, one example of an attempt to address this is the ship strike model that the Canadians have performed which estimated that 123 narwhals and 0.8 bowhead whales would be susceptible to ship strikes each year. It should be noted that the 123 narwhal estimate is as much as the entire Eclipse Sound quota and therefore the level of potential ship strikes alone could have a significant impact.

The MC also discussed the level of other ship traffic in this area. Eclipse Sound is considered a pristine area, with the only other traffic in the summer time bringing supplies to the Canadian village of Pond Inlet, and a few some smaller vessels and sailboats. Baffin Bay has no traffic in the winter (January through June) time, as there is nearly impenetrable pack ice.

The MC expressed interest in hearing what the opinion is of the Canadian government. This issue may be raised again in Council when the Canadian observer is expected to attend.

Heide-Jørgensen informed the MC that there is a Canadian impact assessment process, but this process appears to only have concerned the reloading of the iron ore and not the shipping of the product through Baffin Bay. Any impact assessment that would be conducted in Greenland would not have legal impact for Canadian laws. It may be possible to address this through UNCLOS, as it is an activity in one country that affects another country.

Greenland informed the MC that the Mary River-Baffinland project is an activity that Greenland has not been consulted with, either during the planning stages, or now that the activities have started. Greenland and Canada are neighbour states and have many shared marine mammals and seabirds, including polar bears. Greenland and Canada have existing MOUs on narwhal, beluga, and polar bears, and conduct bilateral meetings on seal issues. Greenland expressed concern that they have not been part of the assessment review process. Greenland will follow the project and work to be directly involved in this issue in the future, as it has a potential to seriously negatively affect some of their most important resources, narwhal, beluga, seals.

The MC highlighted that there appear to be 3 main concerns with this project:

- 1) The effects of the shipping routes
- 2) Vessels moving through the pack ice, and the effects of their presence and the noise generated
- 3) The possibility of accidents, including spills of oil or other chemicals

The MC proposed a **new Request for Advice** from the SC to [DRAFT TEXT] *“monitor the development of the Mary River Project and assess qualitatively or if possible quantitatively the likely impact and consequences on marine mammals in the area.”*

The MC looks forward to further comments on this issue after the SC has fully reviewed this issue, and the other issues raised at the Disturbance Symposium.

4.3. Climate change

Tore Haug from the Institute of Marine Research in Norway, and vice-chair of the SC, presented updates from the SC on environmental issues, particularly the impacts of climate change. Although there are no active requests for advice from the SC on environmental issues from Council, the SC feels these are important issues to address.

In the Barents and Norwegian Seas, cod abundance has increased, and its range has extended northwards in recent years. One implication of this is a new overlap of feeding grounds with harp seals and minke whales, two other important top predators in the area. Both these mammal species have exhibited declines in body condition in recent years, and competition for food with the increasing cod stock is suggested as a possible explanation.

Harp seals are experiencing decreasing ice conditions. This is a matter of concern, considering that this species is dependent on ice for breeding, moulting and resting. Norway plans to continue satellite tagging efforts with harp seals in both the Barents and White Seas.

In Icelandic waters during the last two decades, substantial increases in sea temperature and salinity have been reported. Concurrently, pronounced changes have occurred in the distribution and abundance of several cetacean species and their prey since regular monitoring began in 1987. A northward shift in summer distribution of capelin and a crash in the abundance of sand eel are suspected to be the primary cause of the recent shift in distribution of common minke whales away from Icelandic coastal waters. Continued monitoring of the distribution and abundance of cetaceans is essential for conservation and management of the cetacean populations and as a part of wider studies of ongoing changes in the ecosystem.

Comments by the MC

The MC discussed the importance of satellite tagging to obtain information movements. These information can also inform on the amount of time that the seals spend travelling between the ice where they rest, breed, and moult, and their foraging areas. The increased travelling time increases their energetic costs.

Greenland noted that these issues are very relevant to Greenland, especially the changes in distribution of whales and seals.

Greenland also informed the MC that even though they are not involved in the “Pikialasorsuaq project” KNAPK is following the project. This project is following the effects of climate change on the North Water Polynya (NOW) area near the villages of Qaanaaq and Upernavik. The project also includes many fish species on the East Greenland shelf.

4.4. Other topics

Greenland informed the MC they are following the Arctic Biodiversity assessment in the Arctic Council’s CAFF WG which is following the effects of climate change on the flora and fauna in the Arctic. A meeting was held recently in Nuuk, where a Greenlandic scientist had the opportunity to give input on this project.

GINR also has created a new Institution on Environment and Mineral Resources dealing with environmental issues. This department will give advice on development of natural resources in the area in a responsible manner that will maintain food security.

As an update from last year's MC meetings, Greenland informed that the Nutrition Board has repeated their advice that pollution from industrialised countries has had a long term negative effect on Arctic marine mammals. The levels of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) in marine mammals, including a favoured food in Greenland, mattak, is among the most toxic food items. The Nutrition Board is making recommendations, via distribution of leaflets, to adult women of reproductive age not to eat products from toothed whales and large seals where heavy metals are highest. The advice is to eat other local resources, not Western food. This is particularly concerning for the residents of Qaanaaq and East Greenland who are highly dependent on marine mammals, particularly narwhal and polar bears.

The issue is concerning. Greenland would like NAMMCO to make a statement to relevant bodies to bring awareness to the problem of pollution.

The MC raised concerns that if NAMMCO makes a statement regarding pollutants in marine mammals that they are careful to be clear about the higher levels of pollutants in toothed whales versus baleen whales.

5. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

5.1. Marine mammal - fisheries interactions

There are a few standing and ongoing requests for advice from the Scientific Committee on this agenda item.

R-1.1.5 (standing): *The Council encourages scientific work that leads to a better understanding of interactions between marine mammals and commercially exploited marine resources, and requested the Scientific Committee to periodically review and update available knowledge in this field.*

R-1.1.8 (ongoing): *In addressing the standing requests on ecosystem modelling and marine mammal fisheries interaction, the SC is requested to extend the focus to include all areas under NAMMCO jurisdiction. In the light of the distributional shifts seen under T-NASS 2007, the SC should investigate dynamic changes in spatial distribution due to ecosystem changes and functional responses. See also 1.1.6 and 1.4.6.*

R-1.4.7 (NAMMCO/23-2015): *The Scientific Committee is requested to review the results of the MAREFRAME ecosystem management project when these become available. In particular, the results should be reviewed with respect to the ongoing and standing requests on marine mammal interactions (R-1.1.0) and multispecies approaches to management (R-1.2.0).*

The SC reported at their last meeting that the European MAREFRAME project includes several components addressing marine mammal fisheries interactions. These include research on interactions between cod and common minke whales in Icelandic waters and between cod and seals off Scotland. The MAREFRAME project is scheduled to be concluded in 2017, after which the SC will review the result as requested by the Council.

Comments by the MC

The MC notes the report of the SC, and will await the SC's review of the MAREFRAME project after its completion in 2017.

5.2. By-catch data and monitoring

Bycatch is problematic in both Iceland and Norway. In Norway, a coastal reference fleet has been established to develop bycatch estimates of marine mammals in gillnet fisheries. The vessels in the reference fleet are regular fishing vessels which are particularly requested to report catches of marine mammals. Using data from this fleet, Norway realized that there is extensive bycatch of marine mammals, particularly harbour porpoise and harbour and grey seals.

Mitigation experiments using pingers are in progress in Norway. In addition, an aerial survey designed for harbour porpoises will be conducted in 2016 from southern Norway to Lofoten, with the aim of developing an abundance estimate to determine whether these bycatches are sustainable.

A NAMMCO Bycatch WG meeting will be held directly before the Coastal Seals WG in the first week of March to discuss a plan for addressing bycatch issues in NAMMCO, versus, for example the work done in the ICES Bycatch WG.

Comments by the MC

The MC discussed that the bycatch problems arise mainly in the gillnets fisheries, not trawls, and specifically the cod and lumpfish fisheries. Prior to the development of the reference fleet, Norway did not have a reliable reporting system, and the number of reports of bycatch before the reference fleet were close to zero.

Greenland reported that as part of their new MSC certification of their lumpfish fisheries there has been a change in the national reporting requirements and process for bycatch of marine mammals and seabirds. The fisherman reports bycatch to the fisheries organizations they sell the fish to, then the organisation reports to the ministry on a daily to weekly basis. Prior to this system, all reported bycatches as part of the annual catch reporting. All vessels are also required to report bycatch via logbooks.

Greenland reported on an increasing number of entanglements of humpback whales. In 2015, 10 humpback whales were entangled: 9 in West Greenland, 1 in East Greenland. Of these 10 entangled whales, it was confirmed that 5 died, and the other 5 had an unknown fate. This issue was raised as a possible welfare issue in the NAMMCO Committee on Hunting Methods. Greenland inquired which forum in NAMMCO to address these issues. The MC discussed that this will be discussed in Council when the report of the Committee on Hunting Methods is presented.

Faroese informed the MC that vessels are required to report bycatch of marine mammals in the electronic logbooks, including zero bycatch, and if there is any bycatch the species should be reported.

Iceland updated the MC that there is legislation requiring that all bycatch must be reported to the Directorate. Recently there have been technical problems regarding sending the information to MRI, however working is being done on resolving these issues. In the past there have been problems of the Directorate not receiving any reports of bycatch. Inspectors in the Directorate of Fisheries are actively working on this issue.

Norway informed the MC that fishermen are required to report all bycatch, but reports are very few.

Russia also informed the MC that there have been reports of bycatch of large whales in crab fisheries (using bottom set traps) in the open area of the Barents Sea. In 2016 PINRO plans to organize data collection on marine mammals by-catch onboard crab vessels by observers. The first results of these data collection and monitoring efforts will be prepared and presented in the Russian Progress National Report at the next NAMMCO Scientific Committee Meeting.

5.2.1. Trade issues

At the SC/22 meeting, the SC discussed a recent letter from USA to Norway informing them that the USA is implementing rules potentially banning import of marine products from countries with fisheries with high bycatch (gillnets). It was noted that the letter is unclear whether the USA is planning on banning all marine products or just products from the problematic fishery. This is a potentially significant economic issue for all NAMMCO countries, which is another reason for the increased emphasis on future work on harbour porpoises and bycatch in general.

Norway informed the MC that they are currently in the process of discussing this issue with the USA and will provide an update in the future.

Greenland and the Faroe Islands reported that they have not received such a letter from the USA, but agreed that this is potentially a matter of concern for all NAMMCO member countries.

5.3. Ecosystem-based management

There are a two standing and ongoing requests to the Scientific Committee on this agenda item.

R-1.2.1 (ongoing): *consider whether multispecies models for management purposes can be established for the North Atlantic ecosystems and whether such models could include the marine mammals compartment. If such models and the required data are not available then identify the knowledge lacking for such an enterprise to be beneficial to proper scientific management and suggest scientific projects which would be required for obtaining this knowledge.*

R-1.2.2 (standing): *In relation to the importance of the further development of multispecies approaches to the management of marine resources, the Scientific Committee was requested to monitor stock levels and trends in stocks of all marine mammals in the North Atlantic.*

The Chair of the MC referred the committee to the upcoming presentation on the first day of the Council meeting from Nicola Beaumont, an Invited Speaker, who will talk about

ecosystem-based management. The MC looks forward to hearing from Dr. Beaumont, and how NAMMCO can continue to strive for ecosystem-based management.

5.4. Procedures for decision making on conservation and management measures

The Secretariat informed the MC of an issue that arose during the Large Whale Assessment WG and the SC meeting regarding NAMMCO using management procedures developed in other organizations.

As background to the issue, the management advice for humpback whales in Greenland is based on the management procedure, the *Strike Limit Algorithm*, which was developed in the Aboriginal Whaling Management Procedure sub-committee of the IWC. This IWC procedure uses the *Needs Statement* in its calculations. The Needs Statement is a document that Greenland submits to the IWC stating how many whales they “require”.

At the NAMMCO Large Whale Assessment WG, the WG and the SC gave the advice

“The NAMMCO WG endorsed th[e] SLA as the best current basis for providing management advice for West Greenland humpback whales, as well as the current advice of up to 10 strikes per year requested by Greenland (within the IWC system) as being safe. The WG discussed but did not come to a conclusion on whether NAMMCO should consider the impact that the IWC’s Needs Statement has on the quotas given by the SLA, considering that it is a component of the SLA procedure.”

*Based on the work of the WG, the SC **endorsed** the advice of 10 strikes per year based on the SLA that was accepted by the IWC, and noted that a higher number may be sustainable.”*

Comments by the MC

Greenland noted that they receive a limited number of humpback whales within the IWC system. The quota of 10 whales based on the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling procedures and are not formed in a similar manner to how NAMMCO usually develops its management advice. Greenland plans to propose a request to the SC “for advice on a sustainable catch level of humpbacks in WG”. The proposed text of the request will be presented to MCC.

The MC informed the SC that any time management procedures from another organization are used in formulating management advice, the SC should make sure that those procedures meet the NAMMCO management objectives before basing their advice on those procedures.

5.5. Other topics

There were no other topics raised.

6. USER KNOWLEDGE IN MANAGEMENT DECISION-MAKING

Greenland informed the MC that the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture plan to make a campaign for the public, especially in north Greenland, and also East Greenland, on the inclusion of user knowledge in management decision making process. This campaign will primarily focus on narwhal and beluga, but also polar bears. There is a national action plan to fulfil agreements in the range states of polar bears. Although NAMMCO does not deal with

polar bears, this species is an important Arctic species, and these issues also have implications for ringed seals.

Greenland also referred to past presentations to the MC discussing programmes where local people are monitoring the distribution and presence of local wildlife. The local residents are also helping make management advices for local wildlife. Greenland will report more information on these programmes to the MC in the future.

KNAPK also informed the MC that an application for funding has been submitted to the Danish Environmental Ministry for a project working on how user knowledge can fit into management decisions. The application includes funds for a joint WG with NAMMCO.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No additional business was raised. The Chair closed the meeting of the Joint Management Committees.