



Press Release – February 11, 2016

NAMMCO - 24th Annual Council in Oslo

Whales and seals: Management matters!

The increasing stocks of narwhal, beluga and walrus are a clear result of sound and science-based management, following advice from NAMMCO, the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission.

This was one of several positive results and initiatives presented to the Council of NAMMCO at its annual meeting in Oslo on February 10-11.

However, the NAMMCO Council recognises that increased human activities (shipping, mining, etc.) in the Arctic may threaten the ecosystem.

The parties were particularly concerned by a large scale iron-ore project (Mary River Project operated by Baffinland Iron Mines Corp) which may include shipping up to 10 months a year through some of the most important areas for narwhal, beluga and walrus. The increased shipping activities and noise disturbances could lead to the marine mammals abandoning these areas. This could have severe consequences for local communities, both in Canada and Greenland.

Also, climate change carries serious consequences for marine mammals. This can already be seen from the decreasing blubber thickness of harp seals and minke whales in the Barents Sea, and the changes in geographical distribution of minke whale and fin whale around Iceland.

Therefore, effective ecosystem-based management matters.

For more information concerning the Council Meeting outcome, see below.

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Appendix

NAMMCO - the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission - is an international body for cooperation on the conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission held its 24th Council meeting from 10 – 11 February 2016, in Oslo, Norway. The member countries of NAMMCO, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway again confirmed their commitment to ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of marine mammals through active regional cooperation and science-based management decisions.

The Governments of Canada, Denmark, Japan and the Russian Federation were represented by observers at the meeting, as well as other international governmental organizations within the fields of fisheries (Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Organization, NAFO; North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, NEAFC) and whaling (International Whaling Commission, IWC) and conservation (IWMC World Conservation Trust).

Key events and conclusions from the meeting included the following:

- **Ecosystem-Based Management of Marine Mammal**

Dr. Nicola Beaumont of the Plymouth Marine Laboratory talked about marine mammals in the framework of an ecosystem approach. She underlined the importance of assessing the full array of services they provide to the ecosystem as well as their interdependencies with the other components of the ecosystem. Their immense importance to nature and human beings made it essential to work toward their conservation. She was impressed to see how NAMMCO had applied an ecosystem approach since its very beginning.

- **Improving hunting methods**

NAMMCO's 2nd expert group meeting to assess killing data in the large whale hunts in the member countries, and also in Japan, Canada and USA confirms positive development in quick and efficient kills. The introduction of the explosive grenade and the continuous development of hunting methods is improving animal welfare. The number of animals killed instantaneously has increased significantly in many hunts.

- **Inspection and Observation of Hunts**

NAMMCO operates an international observation scheme to monitor whether national legislation and decisions made by the Commission are respected. Observers are appointed to report on hunting activities in member countries. The scope for 2016 is minke whaling in Norway.

- **Whale Surveys**

New surveys were carried out in the NAMMCO member countries in 2015 to update knowledge on abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the North Atlantic. Although the weather was not always cooperative in all areas, the amount of area covered by the surveys and the number of sightings was good, and new abundance estimates are expected for fin, humpback, common minke and pilot whales.

- **Shared resources between Canada and Greenland**

Council highlighted the good work and cooperation between NAMMCO and the Joint Commission on Narwhal and Beluga, which has developed a catch-allocation model that allows managers to assign catches from the different narwhal stocks that are shared by Canada and Greenland.

Council welcomes this new methodological development for this complex management situation. The development and implementation of the allocation model is considered a step forward and could potentially be applied in many situations where migratory populations are exploited in several areas under various jurisdictions.

- **International Cooperation**

With climate change and unforeseeable consequences for marine mammals, it is essential to increase the cooperation between organisations dealing with marine mammals. NAMMCO aims therefore at strengthening its cooperation with the Arctic Council, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) and any other international instrument which may require the advice of NAMMCO.

- **Scientific Advice**

The best scientific evidence forms the basis of management advice in NAMMCO. Through the Scientific Committee, many specialist topics are addressed by Expert Working groups. During 2016, topics to be dealt with include stock assessments of coastal seals, fin, minke and humpback whales, as well as by-catch issues. The Scientific Committee has also been tasked to assess the impact of the Mary River Project.