



Tromsø, 21 August 2023

To the Attention of the United Nations (UN) Food Systems Summit Special Envoy

Honourable UN Food Systems Summit Special Envoy Dr. Agnes Kalibata,

I am contacting you in my capacity as the General Secretary of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission, NAMMCO, on behalf of the Commission.

Recognising that the upcoming Food Systems Summit will be a crucial opportunity to take stock of current practices and advance global action towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, I would like to underline that **effectively and responsibly managed marine mammal hunting can contribute to resilient and sustainable food systems (socially, economically, and environmentally)**. Several marine mammal populations can support a controlled and precautionary catch. Although many marine mammal stocks, especially of large whales but also some seal species, were overharvested and some hunted to near extinction, the ongoing impression that most remain in danger is false. There are several healthy populations which can sustain a harvest, some have recovered to pre-harvest levels or above because of lower, and sustainable, hunting pressure and favourable conditions.

Marine mammals play a key role in the livelihood and food security of many coastal communities, particularly in the Arctic, but also in many coastal areas around the world. More than half of the countries in the world, 118 out of 193, consume marine mammals, obtained from direct and indirect catches and sometimes landings, with a total of 85 species being consumed (for more details see Roberts and Reeves 2017* and the attached map compiled from this paper and more recent data from different sources). As recently demonstrated, marine mammals can offer a local, low carbon, and more environmentally friendly meat source than local or imported agricultural products (Zinger et al. 2022**). Few types of food are, however, so stigmatised, and systematically ignored in the discourse on food security as marine mammals. It is therefore important that an event as important as the **UN Food Systems Summit recognises and discusses the role that marine mammals play around the world in ensuring food security and food sovereignty, both now and in the future.**

The inclusion of marine mammals in food systems can support and accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, and bring proteins, benefits, and jobs in many places where alternatives are few.

Contrasted with unprecedented, multifaceted crises, **well managed and sustainable hunting can be one of the game-changing solutions for food system transformation and contribute to addressing the climate crisis**. Marine mammals provide a low carbon and low water option for animal protein that, together with other aquatic foods, can be at the core of transformative food systems that aim to ensure food accessibility and availability for all without undermining climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Food systems that integrate the sustainable use of marine mammal also have other advantages for environmental conservation than just low GHG emissions and little freshwater withdrawal. There are very limited collateral impacts such as by-catch or discards, habitat disruption or destruction and pollution involved in marine mammal hunting. There can be little waste, thus making them a

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