



# MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR CETACEANS

*13-14 September 2022  
Grand Hotel, Oslo & Hybrid*

**REPORT**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	CHAIR’S OPENING REMARKS .....	4
2.	ADOPTION OF AGENDA .....	4
3.	CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR WHALE STOCKS .....	4
3.1	<b>BELUGA</b> .....	4
3.2	<b>NARWHAL</b> .....	6
3.3	<b>NORTHERN BOTTLENOSE WHALE</b> .....	8
3.4	<b>KILLER WHALE</b> .....	9
3.5	<b>WHITE-BEAKED, WHITE-SIDED AND BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS</b> .....	10
3.6	<b>HARBOUR PORPOISE</b> .....	11
4.	ANY OTHER BUSINESS .....	11
5.	CLOSE OF MEETING .....	11
6.	ADOPTION OF REPORT .....	12
	Appendix 1: Participant List .....	13
	Appendix 2: Document List .....	16
	Appendix 3: Agenda .....	17

## 1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC), Ulla Svarrer Wang (FO), welcomed participants to the meeting (see Appendix 1 for the list of participants) and noted that Albert Chacón from the NAMMCO Secretariat would act as rapporteur.

The Chair noted that all the meeting documents had been made available on the NAMMCO website two weeks prior to the meeting. The list of meeting documents is available in Appendix 2 of this report. The Chair drew particular attention to the following documents as relevant for all agenda items:

*NAMMCO/29/MC/05: Recent Proposals for Conservation and Management and Research Recommendations.*

*NAMMCO/29/MC/06: Summary of Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee and Responses by the Scientific Committee.*

*NAMMCO/29/08: Report of the 28th Meeting of the Scientific Committee.*

The Chair noted that, prior to the meeting, Member Countries were invited to submit updates in writing on their advances towards the implementation of previous proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research.

The Chair noted that the MCC was specifically asked to discuss and decide whether to endorse or not the SC proposals for management and recommendations for research with financial implications, as well as to recommend to Council that the request the SC considered answered be closed. The chair also informed participants that the meeting would focus on:

- a) Reviewing the new information on cetacean species provided by the Scientific Committee during its last meeting in 2022 (SC 28).
- b) Considering both the new and reiterated proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research (with implications for Member Countries) made by SC 28.
- c) Reviewing responses from SC 28 to active requests for advice and determining whether any requests maybe considered completed and closed.

## 2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without modification.

## 3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR WHALE STOCKS

### 3.1 BELUGA

#### Active requests from council

**R-3.4.11:** *To update the assessment of both narwhal and beluga, noting that new data warrant such an exercise*

#### Updates from the Scientific Committee

The SC informed that updated assessments were done by the Joint JCNB-NAMMCO Working Group (JWG), which met in December 2021, and by the *Ad hoc* Working Group on Narwhals in East Greenland (NEGWG), which met in October 2021. Also, SC/28 had planned a Disturbance Workshop in December 2022 to be held under the JWG.

## Recommendations from the Scientific committee

Mikkelsen noted that SC 28 had provided three new proposals for conservation and management and five new recommendations for research with implications for the Member Countries. It was also noted that SC 28 had reiterated its previous recommendation to implement seasonal closures for the hunt of belugas in West Greenland, and also reiterated that no hunting of belugas be allowed at any time in the area south of 65 degrees North in West Greenland. All recommendations from the Scientific committee can be found in document NAMMCO/29/MC/05.

### New Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

- *Greenland conducts a summer survey of the High Arctic beluga population.*
- *In East Greenland, hunter observations of belugas be collected in a structured manner, incl. photo or video footage of the animals, where and when the sighting took place and how many individuals were seen.*
- *Greenland collects the following additional information from all dead (caught or by-caught) belugas: skin biopsy sample, length, tooth, girth measurements and presence of milk in the female's mammary glands.*
- *Greenland collects Genetic data and/or microchemistry data that could show new stocks or mixing of existing stocks should be obtained.*
- *In West Greenland, genomic analysis be performed on samples from Igloodik and Taloyoak.*

### Reiterated Proposal for Conservation and Management

SC 28 reiterated that:

- *Greenland implements seasonal closures for the hunt of belugas in West Greenland*
- *Greenland makes sure no hunting of belugas be allowed at any time in the area south of 65 degrees North in West Greenland.*

### New Proposals for Conservation and Management

- *Greenland keeps belugas in East Greenland fully protected, as there is insufficient information to perform an assessment of belugas in East Greenland.*
- *Greenland documents any by-catch of Belugas in East Greenland in the Special Reports.*
- *Greenland makes all efforts to release belugas in the case of live by-caught animals.*

### Comments from Member Countries

Greenland noted that the allocated quota of beluga in West Greenland had not been fully utilised for many years and that the cabinet had not allocated quota of beluga in East Greenland since quota system were installed in 2008-2009 in East Greenland. Greenland sees the recommendations from the SC on the West Greenland beluga on seasonal closure very difficult to implement due to lack of utilisation of the quota in West Greenland. In addition, it is difficult for hunters in Greenland to release by-caught animals due to safety issues in areas with ice and rough sea conditions.

Greenland further explained why the quota of beluga in West Greenland had not been fully utilised. Overall, hunting of belugas in West Greenland has become more difficult due to ongoing environmental changes. Small boats are used for hunting, and, because of unstable weather and ice conditions, it is difficult to make use of full quotas if boats cannot go at sea. In addition, belugas and narwhals are closely attached to sea ice, and hunters believe they might be abandoning some areas because of less ice and the threats posed by killer whales.

Regarding the lack of scientific knowledge to assess belugas in East Greenland, Greenland noted that belugas had been hunted for years before the hunt was abandoned due to quotas not being allocated and that hunters do not accept the advice not to hunt beluga in East Greenland due to the fact there

is no sufficient knowledge. Hunters in Greenland argue that knowledge cannot be obtained if stocks are not utilised, and samples taken. More data and knowledge could be obtained if subsistence hunting, associated with sampling, was allowed.

Greenland noted that structured data collection of samples from captured belugas would be difficult in some places and not be possible in some isolated settlements. Measurements and collection of additional individual data require i.e., manual or instruction in local language. However, Greenland is working on the issue to implement this recommendation and is also working on better instructing hunters on how to measure length and make it easier for them to deliver tissues or samples. The required equipment and infrastructure are usually lacking, especially in isolated areas, but Greenland will do their best to implement this recommendation in cooperation with the Institute of Natural Resources in Greenland.

### Conclusion

The MCC noted the SC report and the Disturbance Workshop planned for December 2022.

The MCC could not reach consensus on the endorsement of the following recommendations from the SC:

- *seasonal closures for the hunt of belugas in West Greenland,*
- *no hunting of belugas be allowed at any time in the area south of 65 degrees North in West Greenland*
- *belugas in East Greenland be fully protected.*

The MCC did **endorse** all other new recommendations for research and proposals for management and conservation of belugas.

The research recommendations were **endorsed**, although it was noted that effort would be made to fulfil them as explained from Greenland.

## 3.2 NARWHAL

### Active requests from Council

**R-3.4.11:** *To update the assessment of both narwhal and beluga, noting that new data warrant such an exercise*

### Updates from the Scientific Committee

The SC informed that assessments had been updated both within the Joint Working Group (JWG) with the JCNB, which met in December 2021, and the *Ad hoc* Working Group on Narwhals in East Greenland (NEGWG), which met in October 2021. SC/28 also had planned a Disturbance Workshop in December 2022 to be held under the JWG.

The SC also reported that estimates of extinction risk for narwhals in East Greenland were provided by the Working Group on Narwhals in East Greenland (NEGWG). The assessment for Ittoqqortoormiit was probably the most complete one for any marine mammal population in the NAMMCO management areas. The SC expressed deep concern on the situation, highlighting that if no action was taken, it would be the first time a marine mammal population managed by NAMMCO faced extinction.

### Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

The Chair noted that SC 28 had strongly reiterated an immediate reduction to 0 catches of narwhal in all three management areas of East Greenland. A letter of concern from the Scientific Committee directed to the MCC was provided as document NAMMCO/29/MC/07. Regarding narwhal, SC 28 also provided two new proposals for conservation and management and nine recommendations for research with implications for Member Countries. All recommendations from the Scientific Committee can be found in document NAMMCO/29/MC/05.

### New Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

- *Greenland collects life history data from non-depleted stocks of narwhals in W Greenland and Canada, to examine impact of climate change.*
- *Greenland undertakes further research on stock structure and abundance in Smith Sound.*
- *Greenland conducts new survey in Melville Bay and Inglefield Bredning as soon as possible.*
- *Greenland establishes a community-based biopsy programme of live narwhals to provide samples for stock structure analysis.*
- *Greenland collects the following additional information from hunted narwhals (if a hunt goes ahead, despite recommendations of zero catches in East Greenland): a skin biopsy sample, type of animal (according to the 3 categories described by hunters), photograph of the back, girth measurements and presence of milk in the female's mammary glands.*
- *In West Greenland, where climate change is also expected to have an impact, life history data be collected from non-depleted stocks of narwhals for examining the impact of climate change on life history parameters.*
- *In West Greenland, different approaches to counting narwhals in the fjords be further examined, but only to the extent that new approaches will be compatible with the existing time-series.*
- *In West Greenland, the planning of surveys continues to be done in collaboration with the hunters and survey methodology (including the design of the track lines) continues to be done according to internationally accepted survey standards, to ensure that abundance estimates derived from the survey can be accepted by NAMMCO and used in the assessment.,*
- *In West Greenland, definitions be developed for what constitutes small stocks, depleted stocks and stocks at risk of extirpation, and that frameworks for advice and management then be articulated for what actions should be taken on these different categories.*

### Reiterated Proposal for Conservation and Management

SC 28 reiterated that:

- *Greenland implements an immediate reduction to 0 catches of narwhal in all three management areas of East Greenland*

### New Proposals for Conservation and Management

- *Greenland reduces and mitigates the effects of climate change to protect narwhal's habitat.*
- *Greenland regulates shipping activities from large vessels (including cruise ships) in the summering ground along East Greenland to avoid negative impacts on narwhal populations.*

### Comments from Member Countries

Greenland referred to the presentation from the East Greenland hunters on their knowledge of beluga and narwhal, and that the Ministry continues to develop and increase the collection and use of hunter knowledge, not only on narwhal and beluga issues.

Greenland disagreed on the fact that lack of management action was the only cause for increased extinction risk of narwhals and noted that anthropogenic stressors other than hunting had not been mentioned on this issue. In this sense, Greenland informed of ongoing work regarding a draft executive order to reduce the effects of shipping activities on narwhals in the fjords of East Greenland.

Greenland noted that, due to changes in the cabinet, the quota for narwhal in East Greenland had been increased in order to secure fresh meat, mattak and blubber supply. Greenland sets quotas for

narwhals and belugas based on User Knowledge and recommendations from NAMMCO and the JCNB. The balance between the two knowledge systems could be better and Greenland works to make it less imbalanced with the work to form an executive order on collection and use of hunter and user knowledge.

Norway acknowledged that Greenland was in a difficult position on balancing the two systems but wanted to reiterate the concern of the SC. Norway strongly expressed their concern about the risk that some narwhal stocks could go extinct by 2025. The Faroe Islands noted that it respects the sensitivity of the case of the narwhal in East Greenland and acknowledged the management measures Greenland has taken in this matter. Taken into account the Scientific Committee's letter of concern to the council members, the Faroe Islands asked Greenland to take note of the Scientific Committee's recommendations. Iceland seconded the concerns from Norway and the Faroe Islands.

Greenland reiterated that hunting was not the only factor depleting narwhal stocks and pointed to noise from increased shipping activities and climate change as important factors that needed to be addressed. Greenland also drew attention to an increase in research vessels and the need for coordination among the scientists doing work in Greenland, as their activities may also disturb marine mammals and their habitat.

Norway noted that research vessels needed to apply for a permit from Greenlandic authorities and report any observations made on marine mammal species back to Greenland.

Greenland noted that the Joint Commission on Narwhal and Beluga (JCNB) in Baffin Bay was the main body providing recommendations for narwhals (and beluga) in West Greenland and that the JCNB had not met yet after the last scientific reports had been received. It referred to the National Progress Report for more information on catches of narwhal in West Greenland.

### Conclusion

The MCC was not able to reach consensus in endorsing the reiterated recommendation of zero catches of narwhal in East Greenland. Greenland referred to the statement given for the reasons. All other new recommendations for scientific research and proposals for conservation and management of narwhals were **endorsed**.

The MCC noted that data collection often represent a challenge and that Greenland continues to make every effort to carry them through.

## 3.3 NORTHERN BOTTLENOSE WHALE

### Active requests from Council

***R-1.7.11:** to develop estimates of abundance and trends as soon as possible once the survey has been completed, with the primary target species (fin, minke and pilot whales) as a first priority, and secondary target species as a second priority.*

### Updates from the Scientific Committee

SC 28 informed that regarding Request 1.7.11, all abundance estimates that could be generated from the NASS survey series were completed, except for an overall abundance for bottlenose whales, based on both Icelandic/Faroes and Norwegian data. Norway was progressing with that task, and that sighting data from last years survey would be added to the dataset, as a high number of bottlenose whales was sighted in the Jan Mayen area.



Comments from Member Countries

Norway noted that the request, although nearly completed, should remain open, as there was still some ongoing work done by Norwegian researchers. The chair noted this work would be completed by Norway.

**Conclusion**

The MCC kept the request open.

**3.4 KILLER WHALE****Recommendations from the Scientific Committee**

Regarding killer whales, the Chair noted that SC 28 had formulated a new recommendation for research and also reiterated a previous proposal for management and conservation to Greenland, concerning the regulation of the hunt and the restriction of quotas in a precautionary way.

Reiterated Proposal for Conservation and Management

SC 28 reiterated that:

*Greenland regulates the hunt of killer whales and set quotas in a precautionary way*

New Recommendations for Research

- *NAMMCO should become involved in the organisation of the North Atlantic part of the World Conference planned for April 2023 in Spain.*

Comments from Member Countries

Regarding the reiterated proposal for management and conservation of killer whales, Greenland informed that a new draft executive order regarding small cetaceans, other than beluga and narwhal, was in public hearing. Greenland noted that a framework to introduce restrictions on hunting and consuming killer whales was under consideration, but the proposal had to be in an ordinary hearing process before a final decision could be made by the cabinet.

Greenland is informed by the SC on the level of contamination by killer whales and the health issues for people and dogs fed with killer whale meat, blubber and skin. Greenland noted that recommendations had been made to stop eating the meat, blubber and mattak from killer whales, because of the associated health issues warned from the Health and Motion Council in Greenland. Greenland also informed that they are aware of the letter of concern received from non-NAMMCO related scientists dealing with killer whales but noted that this was not the reason for action on killer whales in Greenland.

With regard to the new recommendation on NAMMCO participating in the Killer whale conference in Spain in 2023, Iceland asked whether that conference was a priority for NAMMCO and whether the SC scientists or the Secretariat should be involved, noting that the SC could have been more precise when formulating this recommendation. In any case, Iceland supported the initiative and acknowledged a decision didn't have to be made at this meeting. The Chair noted the secretariat would look further into this.

**Conclusion**

The MCC **endorsed** the reiterated proposal for management and conservation. The MCC recommended that The Secretariat examines what it entails to participate to the Killer Whale Conference and refers back to FAC regarding financial implications.

## PILOT WHALE

### Active requests from Council

**R-3.8.6:** *to continue work to complete a full assessment of pilot whales in the North Atlantic and provide advice on the sustainability of catches, as soon as necessary further information becomes available, with particular emphasis on the Faroese area and East and West Greenland. In the short term, the SC was requested to provide a general indication of the level of abundance of pilot whales required to sustain an annual catch equivalent to the annual average of the Faroese catch in the years since 1997.*

### Updates from the Scientific Committee

Regarding request 3.8.6, the Scientific Committee noted the second part of the request had been answered by SC 19 in 2012 on the basis of abundance estimates from TNASS 2007 and that the request would be fully addressed at the Pilot Whale Working Group meeting in 2023. This meeting, initially planned for 2022, was postponed to allow for the analyses of both the biological and the tagging data in the Faroes to be duly completed. The Scientific Committee also informed that the availability of data for conducting an assessment on pilot whale would be reviewed at the Harbour Porpoise Working Group Meeting to be held in Oslo in November 2022.

### Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Mikkelsen noted that one new Recommendation for Research on pilot whales had been provided by the Scientific Committee.

#### New Recommendations for Research

- *Faroes complete the analyses of both the biological and the tagging data in time to be forwarded to the 2023 PWWG.*

#### Comments from Member Countries

No comments from the member countries were made.

#### Conclusion

The new recommendation for Research on pilot whales was **endorsed** by the MCC

## 3.5 WHITE-BEAKED, WHITE-SIDED AND BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS

### Active requests from Council

**R-3.9.6:** *the SC was asked to carry out assessments of these species, but to date insufficient information has been available on stock delineation, distribution, abundance and biological parameters to initiate the work. The Committee was pleased to note that considerable progress has been made in the Faroes in describing the ecology and life history of white-sided dolphins and that information on white-beaked dolphins should be available from Iceland and Norway in about 2-year time. Abundance estimates are lacking in all areas except Icelandic coastal waters, and no information on stock delineation or pod structure is yet available. The SCANS survey planned for 2005/6 and coastal surveys planned for Norway (see 9.3) should provide information on distribution and abundance in some areas. The Committee endorsed the plan of the SC to proceed with the assessments once the above-mentioned studies have been completed, probably by 2007.*

### Updates from the Scientific Committee

SC28 answered Request 3.9.6 by indicating that a detailed review of the available information on *Lagenorhynchus sp.* in all member countries should be compiled with the help of the Secretariat and presented to SC 29.

The SC noted a Dolphin working group was scheduled for 2023. SC 28 agreed that more information than ever now existed for these species. SC 28 also agreed that *Lagenorhynchus* dolphins should be added as an item to the agenda of the HPWG meeting to be held in November 2022, to review the information available for an assessment of the species in 2023.

#### Comments from Member Countries

No comments were made by the member countries.

#### **Conclusion**

The MCC noted the report and the updates provided by the Scientific Committee, welcoming the plans for an assessment of *Lagenorhynchus* dolphins in 2023.

## **3.6 HARBOUR PORPOISE**

### Active requests from Council

**R-3.10.1:** The Council noted that the harbour porpoise is common to all NAMMCO member countries, and that the extent of current research activities and expertise in member countries and elsewhere across the North Atlantic would provide an excellent basis for undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the species throughout its range. The Council therefore requested the SC to perform such an assessment, which might include distribution and abundance, stock identity, biological parameters, ecological interaction, pollutants, removals, and sustainability of removals.

### Updates from the Scientific Committee

SC 28 answered Request 3.10.1 by planning a Harbour Porpoise Working Group (HPWG) meeting in Oslo (Norway) in November 2022 to proceed with the assessment of the species for Norway.

#### Comments from Member Countries

Norway welcomed the planning of the HPWG meeting in November in Oslo and confirmed that an assessment of harbour porpoises in Norwegian waters will be prepared in time for this meeting. Norway also informed the committee that this assessment will be based on updated abundance and by-catch estimates for harbour porpoise in Norway, together with updated estimates on some life history parameters. Norway also noted that there are no direct takes of harbour porpoise in Norway.

Greenland informed of the public hearing of a new executive order to implement previous recommendations regarding the underreporting of catches on harbour porpoise in Greenland.

#### **Conclusion**

The MCC noted the updates from the SC and the Member Countries.

## **4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

## **5. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The Chair thanked the participants for their attendance and contributions.

The meeting was interrupted at 17:00 on Tuesday 13 September, to be resumed on Wednesday 14 September morning at 8:30. The meeting was closed at 08:52 on 14 September 2022.

## **6. ADOPTION OF REPORT**

A draft of the report was circulated on 14 September 2022 and was finalised and adopted on 15 September 2022.

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## INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

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## APPENDIX 2: JOINT LIST OF DOCUMENTS FOR THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Doc. No.	Title	Agenda
NAMMCO/29/08	Report of the 28th Meeting of the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/01	Joint List of Documents for the Management Committees	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/02a	Draft Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/28/MC/02b	Draft Annotated Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/28/MC/03a	Draft Agenda Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW)	MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/03b	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW)	MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/04a	Draft Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/28/MC/04b	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/28/MC/05	List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research, with Responses from Parties	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/06	List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/28/MC/08	Letter of Concern from the Scientific Committee	MCC
NAMMCO/28/MC/08	User Knowledge: «food for thought» for NAMMCO	MCJ

MC: Management Committee

MCJ: Joint Meeting of the Management Committees

MCC: Management Committee for Cetaceans

MCSW: Management Committee for Seals and Walruses



## **APPENDIX 3: AGENDA**

- 1. Chair's Opening remarks**
- 2. Adoption of Agenda**
- 3. Conservation and Management Measures for Whale Stocks**
  - 3.1. Beluga**
  - 3.2. Narwhal**
  - 3.3. Northern bottlenose whale**
  - 3.4. Killer whale**
  - 3.5. Pilot whale**
  - 3.6. White-beaked, white-sided and bottlenose dolphins**
  - 3.7. Harbour porpoise**
- 4. Any Other Business**