



MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR CETACEANS

2 March 2023
Online

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 Narwhal	4
3.2 Beluga.....	6
3.3 Harbour porpoise.....	8
3.4 White-beaked, white-sided and bottlenose dolphins.....	10
3.5 Pilot whale.....	11
3.6 Killer whale	11
4. Any other business	12
5. Close of meeting.....	12
6. Adoption of Report.....	12
Appendix 1: Participant List	13
Appendix 2: Joint List of Documents of the Management Committees.....	15
Appendix 3: Agenda	16

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 (see Appendix 2 for the list of meeting documents). The Chair drew particular attention to the following documents as relevant for all agenda items:

- NAMMCO/30/MC/05: Recent Proposals for Conservation and Management and Research Recommendations.
- NAMMCO/30/MC/06: Summary of Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee and Responses by the Scientific Committee.
- NAMMCO/30/08: Report of the 29th Meeting of the Scientific Committee.

Prior to the meeting, Member Countries had been invited to submit updates in writing on advances towards the implementation of previous proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research. The received updates were reflected in document NAMMCO/30/MC/05.

It was also noted that all Member Countries had reported their catch statistics and the updated numbers were available online in the NAMMCO catch database.

The chair also informed participants that the meeting would focus on:

- Reviewing the new information on cetacean species provided by the Scientific Committee during its last meeting in 2023 (SC 29).
- Considering both the new and reiterated proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research (with implications for Member Countries) forwarded by SC/29, and whether the MCC could reach consensus on forwarding them to the Parties.
- Reviewing responses from SC/29 to active requests for advice and determining whether any requests may be considered completed and closed.
- Make recommendations to the Council concerning scientific research.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without modification.

3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR WHALE STOCKS

3.1 NARWHAL

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

Two narwhal surveys (spring and summer, both with cooperation from hunters, had been conducted in Southeast Greenland in 2022. Results from the spring survey supported the segregation observed from satellite tracking, genetic studies and hunting records, but did not support the hypothesis of large numbers of narwhals available for the spring hunt in Ittoqqortoormiit. Results from the summer survey indicated that narwhals from Scoresby Sound kept coming back to the same summering ground where they were hunted, and that low numbers could be found in the Tasiilaq management area where they were occasionally hunted in spring. New abundance estimates from the summer surveys would be

available before the next meeting of the Narwhals in East Greenland Working Group (NEGWG) planned for the end of 2023.

Receiving both the information from the 2022 surveys and the new quotas given for narwhals in 2023, the SC expressed deep concern on the population status of narwhals in Southeast Greenland (SEGL) and strongly reiterating previous recommendations pertaining to removals (see below).

The Disturbance Workshop focusing on the impact of mining projects in the Arctic and associated shipping activities on narwhal, walrus and other marine mammal species that was held in December 2022 produced recommendations for research and proposals for conservation and management of narwhals that are listed below.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

All recommendations from the Scientific Committee can be found in document NAMMCO/30/MC/05.

Recommendations pertaining to removals

Greenland

- To implement an immediate reduction to 0 catches of narwhals in all three management areas of East Greenland. (*Strongly reiterated*)
- Catch limits for West Greenland provided by the JWG be followed.

New Proposals for Conservation and Management

Greenland

- Due to the observed displacement of narwhals from Eclipse Sound caused by shipping traffic and associated ice breaking, future developments avoid shipping within narwhal summering aggregations.
- Because ship traffic causes significant disturbance to narwhals at distances from 0 to 20 km, while icebreaking can cause impacts at distances from 0 to 35 km, these values be used to establish buffer zones around narwhal summer aggregations and establish traffic corridors to protect migration routes and winter foraging grounds.
- Due to its importance as a feeding ground for many Arctic seabirds and marine mammal species, no ship anchoring should occur in Store Hellefiske Bank.
- Hunt management advice should account for the displacement and possible associated changes in fecundity and survival, both in disturbed summer aggregations, as well as in aggregations affected by the displaced animals.

New Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

Greenland

- Conduct tagging studies to determine impacts of shipping in Baffin Bay.
- Obtain biological samples (brains, organs etc.) and morphometrics from the narwhal winter hunt in Disko Bay and the spring hunt in other areas of West Greenland.

Comments from Member Countries

Norway expressed concern, seconded by the Faroe Islands, about the situation of narwhals in East Greenland and urged countries to follow the scientific advice when a stock is under threat of extinction.

Greenland asserted that the government was seriously addressing this situation, but with reference to ensuring food security and fresh meat supply for the communities, the Cabinet decided to establish narwhal quotas on East Greenland for 2023. Having limited agriculture and other industry possibilities, the country is highly dependent on fish and marine mammals as food supply. Marine mammals have special importance for the Greenlandic society and are key for their self-sufficiency, especially in the case of communities in Southeast Greenland, which strongly rely on fish and marine mammals due to the absence of caribou and muskox in the area.

Greenland considers this situation as a food security issue and referred to the International Convention on Cultural Rights (1966) that “all peoples may freely dispose of their natural resources and in no case people will be deprived of their own means of subsistence”. Greenland also argued the relevance of the United Nations Goal to stop starvation and reminded that the importance of marine mammals as food in East Greenland and other areas had been underlined in the NAMMCO Food Conference (October 2022), and also in the Greenland and the EU dialog meeting “Food Security in the Arctic” (February 2023).

Greenland recognised that current knowledge on beluga and narwhal in East Greenland was limited and informed that the quota given for narwhals had been lower than the one requested from the local communities.

Regarding the quotas for narwhals in West Greenland, Geneviève Desportes, General Secretary, reminded that NAMMCO does not provide management advice for narwhals in West Greenland, as this is within the remit of the Joint Canada-Greenland Commission for Narwhal and Beluga (JCNB). Therefore, the SC does not provide a management recommendation, but recommended that the advice from the JCNB-NAMMCO joint scientific Working Group be followed. Greenland informed that previous advice from the JCNB had been followed. The differences between the scientific advice and the present quotas given for narwhal in the management areas of West Greenland were reflecting the doubts posed by the corresponding municipalities regarding the advice, with very drastic changes.

Considering the results provided by the Disturbance Workshop, Greenland expressed great concern about the Mary River project and referred to a previous statement on this subject given at the 2022 MCC meeting. Greenland informed that all new proposals for conservation and management from SC 29 would be supported and that a dialogue would start with the relevant ministries to address them. Greenland would also support the new recommendations for research, highlighting the need to work with the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR), to address these. The GINR would need to initiate a new sampling program to follow the new recommendations, and efforts would be needed regarding the logistics and equipment for processing and storing samples in remote areas.

MCC Conclusion

Recommendations pertaining to removals

The MCC did not reach consensus on forwarding to Greenland the new and reiterated recommendations.

New Proposals for Conservation and Management

The MCC agreed to forward to Greenland all proposals for conservation and management.

New Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

The MCC agreed to forward to Greenland all the recommendations for research.

3.2 BELUGA

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

Belugas are occasionally observed, caught, and by-caught in East Greenland, but no population has been identified. Three belugas were bycaught in seal nets in Ittoqqortoormiit in September 2020, 12 were illegally caught near Tasiilaq in May 2022, and 16 were caught legally near Tasiilaq in December 2022, after a quota had been allocated to the area. Based on preliminary genetic analyses from belugas caught in 2021, these animals were considered to belong to the Norwegian (Svalbard) stock.

Considering the new beluga quotas in both East and West Greenland for 2023, the SC reiterated previous recommendations on beluga catches and protection from SC28.

The Disturbance workshop held in December 2022 had also dealt with the impacts of shipping on belugas in North-West Greenland, resulting in a new recommendation for management pertaining to disturbances.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

All recommendations from the Scientific committee can be found in document NAMMCO/30/MC/05.

Recommendations pertaining to removals:

Greenland

- Implement seasonal closures for the hunt of belugas in West Greenland. (***Strongly reiterated***)
- Make sure no hunting of belugas be allowed at any time in the area south of 65 degrees North in West Greenland. (***Strongly reiterated***)
- Keep belugas in East Greenland fully protected, as there is insufficient information to perform an assessment of belugas in East Greenland. (***Strongly reiterated***)

Proposals for Conservation and Management:

Greenland

- Ship speed regulations of 8 knots be extended to south of the beluga migration route passing Cape York in September-October. This recommendation does not include a buffer around the timing of shipping.
- Any by-catch of belugas in East Greenland be documented in the Special Reports. (***Reiterated***)
- In case of live by-caught belugas in East Greenland, all efforts be made to release the animal. (***Reiterated***)
- Additional samples be taken from all dead by-caught belugas in East Greenland, and all caught belugas in West Greenland, besides the already mandatory information (date and location of the by-catch, sex, presence/absence of a foetus). This additional information includes skin biopsy sample, length, a tooth, girth measurements, and whether there is milk in the mammary glands of females. (***Reiterated***)
- The documentation of hunter observations of belugas in East Greenland is collected in a structured manner, including photographs or video footage of the animals, information on where and when the sighting took place, and how many individuals were seen. (***Reiterated***)

The Chair of the SC Rosing-Asvid noted that regarding the second and third recommendations pertaining to by-catch, those animals would now be part of the quota animals.

Comments from Member Countries

Greenland informed that beluga advice in the North Water management area is being followed, as reflected by the reduced quota for the period 2021-2028, with a quota of 29 instead of 37, because of an overharvest of 64 whales in 2019. Greenland further informed that the quota for West Greenland had never been fully taken since they were introduced in 2004. Therefore, the Cabinet decided that all licensed hunters could freely hunt there. Regarding belugas south of 65° North, Greenland considers that the population may never recover there, even in the absence of hunting because of the increase in shipping through Baffin Bay associated to the Mary River mine, which is expected to disturb belugas.

Greenland informed of a self-imposed stop in the export of beluga products (narwhal since 2008). Responding to a question from Norway on where beluga products were exported to, Greenland clarified that the term “export” referred to the transport of products (e.g., meat, mattak) to Denmark Greenlandic Houses and health Care Institutions which are for private use. Greenland also informed that the freight of beluga between East and West is under consideration of being stopped in the near

future due to shortage of local meat supply. This regulation will ensure that catches are used for local consumption but has yet to be approved by the Cabinet.

Greenland informed that the quota for East Greenland was to provide meat supply and food security to the remote communities in Southeast Greenland. Greenland further clarified that the technical quota of 30 belugas in East Greenland was not an annual quota for 2023, but a quota for the whole period from 16 December 2022 to 2027. Greenland informed that 16 belugas had been taken in December 2022. Once the total quota is taken (30), the hunt will be closed until 2027.

Norway expressed concern that the belugas taken in East Greenland originated from a stock that was protected in Norwegian (Svalbard) waters. Greenland responded that there was currently little scientific evidence of this. Results from DNA analyses from 3 belugas by-caught in 2020 had shown that these had the same DNA as belugas in Svalbard. The DNA analysis of belugas caught in 2022 were still not available to determine whether all animals hunted in East Greenland did belong to the Norwegian (Svalbard) stock.

Regarding the 8 knots recommendation, Greenland informed that the Ministry of Fisheries and Hunting has no jurisdiction to regulate ship speed, but that there would be a dialogue with the relevant ministries to address this recommendation. Greenland also informed of a new executive order on collection and use of user knowledge, that will allow a more structured collection of data from hunters. Every time an observation of beluga occurs in Greenland, video footage and images are being collected. Greenland also informed that all catches, both direct or by-catch, of belugas must already be reported, and will continue to do so, and that there will be collection of additional samples from all dead belugas.

MCC Conclusion

Recommendation pertaining to removals

The MCC did not reach consensus on forwarding to Greenland the reiterated recommendations related to removals of belugas in East and West Greenland.

Proposals for Conservation and Management

The MCC agreed to forward to Greenland all proposals for conservation and management.

3.3 HARBOUR PORPOISE

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **Request R-3.10.1 (ongoing):** *To perform assessments of harbour porpoise in each NAMMCO member country. Such assessments might include distribution and abundance, stock identity, biological parameters, ecological interaction, pollutants, removals, and sustainability of removals.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

An assessment of harbour porpoise in Norwegian waters had been conducted by the Harbour Porpoise Working Group (HPWG), which met in November 2022. Based on the results of that assessment, the SC had concluded that the Norwegian by-catch of harbour porpoise was not sustainable and had forwarded to the MCC several recommendations (see below). The SC also agreed that catch levels of harbour porpoise in Greenland were deemed unsustainable and recommended that previous management advice be implemented.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

All recommendations from the Scientific committee can be found in document NAMMCO/30/MC/05.

New Recommendations pertaining to removalsNorway

- Continue its efforts to reduce the by-catch of harbour porpoises which is deemed unsustainable.

Greenland

- Implement the management advice given on harbour porpoise in West Greenland (i.e., no more than 2900 total removals, i.e., including an assumed quota for unreported individuals).

New Proposals for Conservation and ManagementNorway

- Assess the compliance of the fleet to the pinger regulations in Vestfjorden as a basis for evaluating the efficacy of the pinger mandate.
- Consider expanding the use of pingers to areas north and west of Vestfjorden.
- Due to the present unsustainable level of by-catch, consider the best way of ensuring that the mandatory use of pingers is enforced.
- Implement the use of REM systems in fishing vessels outside the CRF, to complement the by-catch data from the CRF.

New Recommendations for Research with implications for member countriesFaroe Islands

- Support the creation of an App where users of coastal areas (i.e., fishers, recreational boats) can report observations, catch and by-catch of harbour porpoises.
- Initiate the collection of biological data on harbour porpoise.

Iceland

- Generate the best back-calculated by-catch estimates (i.e., a time series going back to the beginning of the fishery) for the upcoming Icelandic assessment.

Norway

- Increase tagging efforts to inform on movements, distribution, and stock delineation of harbour porpoise in Norwegian waters.
- Collect more biological samples to increase the life history information feeding the population models.
- Look into potential by-catch of porpoises in recreational fisheries to potentially include recreational fisheries in future by-catch estimates.
- Include by-catch data from larger (>15m) vessels into the by-catch estimates used for the assessment.
- Look into the effects of ghost nets on harbour porpoise mortality dynamics and, if a concern, increase efforts in removing ghost nets in areas of high porpoise density.
- By-catch estimates be back-calculated as far back as possible (e.g., until 1970) using landings and included in future assessments.

Comments from Member Countries

Norway informed that some of the recommendations pertaining to removals and proposals for conservation and management of harbour porpoise directed to Norway were already implemented, and all remaining ones would be followed up. Regarding the new recommendation for research, Norway also agreed to these proposals.

Greenland informed that the recommendations for removals were noted. It was also informed that due to social economic considerations and a discrepancy between the knowledge and understanding of hunters and scientists, the scientific advice has not been fully followed.

MCC Conclusion

Recommendations on removals

The MCC agreed to forward the recommendation for removals pertaining to Norway but could not reach consensus on forwarding the recommendation for removals pertaining to Greenland.

Proposals for Conservation and Management

The MCC agreed to forward to Norway all the proposals for conservation and management.

Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

The MCC agreed to forward all recommendations for research directed to the Faroe Island, Iceland and Norway.

3.4 WHITE-BEAKED, WHITE-SIDED AND BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **Request R-3.9.6 (ongoing):** To carry out assessments of dolphin species for which there are removals.

Updates from the Scientific Committee

In response to request R-3.9.6, all available information on *Lagenorhynchus sp.* in all member countries had been reviewed by the HPWG in November 2022. A series of recommendations for research were discussed and endorsed by the SC (see below). A Dolphin working group (DWG) had been scheduled for autumn 2023 and SC 29 had defined its Terms of Reference (see document NAMMCO/30/08 for more details).

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

New Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

Faroe Islands

- Age determination from random teeth samples from different periods of time should be added to the age structure information on *Lagenorhynchus acutus*.
- Investigate any changes in age structure over different years to resolve whether some cohorts are underrepresented in the samples.
- Complete the analyses of life history parameters.
- Together with Greenland, collect data for genetic analyses and make sure they are integrated within the current European genetic analyses for *Lagenorhynchus sp.* coordinated by ASCOBANS.

Greenland

- Increase effort in collecting samples for genetic analysis.
- Prepare catch statistics separating both species, where possible.

Iceland

- Provide a table with the by-catch information available for each *Lagenorhynchus* species.

Comments from Member Countries

Greenland informed that the recommendations for research with implications for Greenland would be supported but highlighted the need for a new sampling program to be approved in order to collect the required samples of *Lagenorhynchus* dolphins. Regarding catch statistics of *Lagenorhynchus* dolphins, Greenland informed that both *Lagenorhynchus* species (*L. acutus* and *L. albirostris*) had been reported separately in the catch data since 2020.

MCC Conclusion

The MCC agreed to forward all recommendations for research directed to the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland pertaining to *Lagenorhynchus* dolphins.

3.5 PILOT WHALE

- **Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council R-3.8.6 (ongoing):** *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.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

In response to request R-3.8.6 all available information for a future assessment of pilot whales had been reviewed by the HPWG in November 2022. A series of recommendations for research were discussed and endorsed by the SC (see below). The SC recommended to Council that the meeting of the Pilot Whale Working Group (PWWG), initially scheduled for 2023, be postponed to 2025 to allow for the new abundance estimates generated by NASS 24 to be included as input to the assessment.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

New Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

Faroe Islands

- Given the high number of available data (2000+), 150+ teeth samples collected randomly in 2013-2022 should be aged and the corresponding reproductive data analysed to obtain a long-term trend in life history parameters.
- Collect and analyse genetic samples together with Iceland and Greenland, to get better knowledge on stock identity.
- Investigate the potential relationship between pollutants and life history parameters of pilot whales between the first sampling period (1986-1989) and the present one (2013-2022).

Comments from Member Countries

The Faroe Islands indicated that all the above recommendations for research on pilot whales would be followed and the analyses ready for the PWWG meeting.

MCC Conclusion

The MCC agreed to forward all the recommendations for research directed to the Faroe Islands.

3.6 KILLER WHALE

Updates from the Scientific Committee

Previous management recommendations made by SC25 on killer whales in Greenland had not been followed. The SC thus agreed to reiterate these recommendations and further recommended that Greenland regulates the hunt and restricts quotas in a precautionary way. To help determine stock structure, it was recommended to continue sampling efforts in all member countries, and to carry out further analyses of pollutant levels and genetic analyses.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Recommendation pertaining to removals:

Greenland

- Regulate the hunt of killer whales and restrict quotas in a precautionary way. **(Reiterated)**

Proposals for Conservation and Management

Greenland

- Existing catch records be validated and reporting on catches (including struck and loss rates) be improved. (*Reiterated*)
- Killer whales be included in existing mandatory reporting schemes. (*Reiterated*)

New Recommendation for Research with implications for member countries

All countries

- To further sampling efforts, as well as further analyses of pollutant levels and genetic analyses to help determine stock structure.

Comments from Member Countries

Greenland informed that a draft executive order on small cetaceans, including killer whales, was out on public hearing after which it would be sent to the Cabinet for approval. Regarding the recommendation that killer whales be included in existing mandatory reporting schemes, Greenland informed that it was already mandatory to report all catches, but that killer whale catches in Greenland were not included in a special reporting scheme.

MCC Conclusion

Recommendations on removals:

The MCC agreed to forward the recommendation for removals directed to Greenland.

Proposals for Conservation and Management

The MCC agreed to forward to Greenland the proposals for conservation and management.

Recommendations for Research with implications for member countries

The MCC agreed to forward the recommendations for research directed to all 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 closed at 16:11 on Thursday 2 March 2023.

6. ADOPTION OF REPORT

A draft of the report was circulated on 6 March 2023 and was finalised and adopted on 17 March 2023.

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(Deputy Secretary)

APPENDIX 2: JOINT LIST OF DOCUMENTS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Reference	Title	Agenda item
NAMMCO/30/08	Scientific Committee Report	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/30/MC/01	Joint list of Documents for the Management Committees	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/30/MCJ/02	Draft Annotated Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/30/MCC/03	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/30/MCSW/04	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW)	MCSW
NAMMCO/30/MC/05	List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research, with Responses from Parties	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/30/MC/06	List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/30/MC/07	Draft Terms of Reference WG on User Knowledge	MCJ
NAMMCO/30/MC/08	List of Participants	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
For Information Documents		

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. Narwhal**
 - 3.2. Beluga**
 - 3.3. Harbour porpoise**
 - 3.4. White-beaked, white-sided and bottlenose dolphins**
 - 3.5. Pilot whale**
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