



MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUS

1 March 2023
Online

REPORT

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1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), Amalie Jessen (GL), welcomed participants to the meeting (see Appendix 1 for the list of participants) and noted that Charlotte Winsnes from the NAMMCO Secretariat would act as rapporteur.

The Chair noted that all meeting documents (see Appendix 2 for the list of documents) had been made available on the NAMMCO website prior to the meeting.

The Chair drew particular attention to the following documents as relevant for all agenda items:

- NAMMCO/30/MC/05: List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research, with Responses from the Parties.
- NAMMCO/30/MC/06: List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from 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 informed that the meeting would focus on:

- Reviewing the new information on seal species and walrus 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 MCSW could reach consensus for forwarding them to the Parties.
- Reviewing responses from SC/29 to active requests for advice and determining whether any requests maybe considered completed and closed.
- Make recommendations to the Council concerning scientific research.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda was adopted and is available in Appendix 3.

3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEAL AND WALRUS STOCKS

The Chair of the Scientific Committee, Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid (GL), presented under each species the information on seals and walrus stocks reviewed by SC 29 at its meeting in January 2023 and contained in the Scientific Committee report (NAMMCO/30/08).

3.1 BEARDED SEALS

Active request to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **Request R-2.7.1 (ongoing):** *To convene a working group in 2022 with the aim of conducting a thorough review of the existing data and to go ahead with the assessment of stocks for which it is possible. If the data required for a full assessment of (some of) the stocks were not*

available, the WGs and the SC should identify, and prioritise, which specific data essential to their assessments are still needed.

Update from the Scientific Committee

Initially the bearded seal meeting was planned as a Joint NAMMCO/CAFF workshop. However, the limitation posed by the Ukraine war to the work of the Arctic Council and its Working Groups has resulted in the workshop now being organised by NAMMCO though keeping its panarctic scope.

To fully answer request R-2.7.1 requires data on local bearded seal abundance to be analysed and made available to the workshop in March, together with validated catch data. In September 2022, MCSW recommended that Greenland prioritises the analysis of available data prior to the WS. Due to other work (narwhal survey in East Greenland) this work was not prioritised. Anticipating that results from the most recent surveys could be easily generated (analysing data from older surveys is more time consuming), the SC recommended that, if the validated catch data was made available to the upcoming meeting, the WS can define the area for which an assessment could be conducted, and where the abundance data would be most useful to progress in assessing the conservation status of the stock.

The Bearded Seal Workshop (BSWS) will be held 21-23 March 2023 with ToR to review available information and assess the status and trends of the species throughout its range and identify threats and critical knowledge gaps.

Recommendation for conservation and management from the Scientific Committee

Greenland to make the validated bearded seal catch data available to the upcoming BSWS meetings.

Comments from Member Countries

Greenland informed that there had been technical problems pertaining to the database. These problems had now been solved and the catch data will be available for the upcoming workshop.

MCSW Conclusion

The MCSW noted the updates from the Scientific Committee and expressed appreciation that Greenland will ensure the availability of the catch data for the upcoming workshop on 21-23 March 2023.

3.2 RINGED SEALS

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **Request R-2.3.1** (ongoing): *To advise on stock identity of ringed seals for management purposes and to assess abundance in each stock area, long-term effects on stocks by present removals in each stock area, effects of recent environmental changes (i.e., disturbance, pollution, climate change) and changes in the food supply, and interactions with other marine living resources.”*
- **Request R-2.3.3** (ongoing). *To convene a working group in 2022 with the aim of conducting a thorough review of the existing data and to go ahead with the assessment of stocks for which it was possible. If the data required for a full assessment of (some of) the stocks were not available, the WGs and the SC should identify, and prioritise, which specific data essential to their assessments are still needed.*

Update from the Scientific Committee

In response to request R-2.3.1, Rosing-Asvid noted that this request originating from a ringed seal WG held in 1996. It has also been thoroughly addressed in several papers/documents some of which are compiled in the first volume of the NAMMCO Scientific Publications series: “Ringed Seals in the North

Atlantic". The SC recommended that the MCSW consider it closed, acknowledging that it is also essentially replaced by request R-2.3.3.

In response to request R-2.3.3, Rosing-Asvid noted that the ringed seal is also a pan-arctic species and are hunted intensively in both Greenland and Canada. If management areas can be established, then catch statistics and available data on abundance can be allocated to these management areas as a first step towards an assessment.

The planned ringed seal working group (RSWG), consisting of both Greenlandic and Canadian experts, will operate via several (2-3) short online meetings in the fall of 2023 with the first one to focus on management areas and also including pan-arctic experts.

Recommendation from the Scientific Committee for conservation and management

Greenland makes the validated ringed seal catch data available to the upcoming RSWG meetings.

Comments from Member Countries

Greenland referred to its comments under the previous agenda item and informed that the validated ringed seal catch data will be made available for the upcoming RSWG.

Members agreed to consider request R 2.3.1. as answered, also acknowledging that the request 2.3.3. was replacing it.

MCSW Conclusion

The MCSW noted the updates from the Scientific Committee and expressed appreciation that Greenland will ensure that the catch data will be available for the upcoming working group.

The MCSW also agreed to propose to Council to close request R-2.3.1.

3.3 GREY & HARBOUR SEALS

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **Request R-2.4.2** (ongoing): *To provide a new assessment of grey seal stocks throughout the North Atlantic.*
- **Request R-2.5.2** (ongoing): *To conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour seals in all NAMMCO areas as soon as feasible.*

Update from the Scientific Committee:

The Coastal Seals WG will meet 8-11 May 2023 with the following Terms of Reference:

- 1) To provide a new assessment for grey and harbour seals throughout the North Atlantic,
- 2) To provide guidelines for responsible removals from small coastal seal stocks.

Comments from Member Countries

No comments were made.

MCSW Conclusion

The MCSW noted the updates from the Scientific Committee.

3.4 HARP AND HOODED SEALS

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **Request R-2.1.4** (standing). *To regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and hooded seals as new information becomes available.*
- **Request R-2.1.9** (ongoing): *To investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline of Greenland Sea stock of hooded seals and assess the status of the stock.*

Update from the Scientific Committee

In response to request R-2.1.4, Rosing-Asvid informed that the Joint ICES/NAFO/NAMMCO Working Group of Harp and Hooded Seals (WGHARP) will meet in September 2023 to implement the new management tools, to discuss and include new data, and to develop new advice for the management of harp and hooded seals. Prior to this, improvements and advances of assessment models will be made through the planned joint ICES benchmark meeting in May 2023.

In 2022 Norway had carried out a survey of harp and hooded seals in the Greenland Sea. The dataset will be made available to the benchmark meeting and results will finally be evaluated at the WGHARP in 2023.

In response to request R-2.1.9, it was noted that the hooded seal was the most polluted of the seal species, with high levels of PCBs and Hg measured, and that no assessment had been conducted for the NW Atlantic hooded seals since 2004.

Comments from Member Countries

No comments were made.

MCSW Conclusion

The MCSW noted the updates from the Scientific Committee.

3.5 WALRUS

Active requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **Request R-2.6.3rev (ongoing):** Provide advice on the effects of human disturbance, including fishing and shipping activities, tourism, hydrocarbon exploration and mineral extractions on the distribution, behaviour and conservation status of walrus in Greenland.

Update from the Scientific Committee

The SC recommended that the request be considered answered and closed for the following reasons:

- Results and conclusion from the NAMMCO/JCNB Disturbance Workshop,
- Hydrocarbon exploration is not a threat anymore due to the stop of oil exploration in Greenland, and fishing is not considered an issue any longer,
- In general, there is no new data available to respond to this request, apart from specific recommendations to the walrus population near the Dundas Mine in Qaanaaq provided at the Disturbance WS,
- Hunting is the most important issue impacting walrus populations in Greenland,
- Tourism was shown to have no effect on walrus haul-out behaviour, according to a recent study in Svalbard, and is therefore not considered a factor which could be relevant.

The SC plan to convene the WG on Walrus in 2024 to address the need for advice to Greenland.

Recommendations for research from the Scientific Committee

Arising from the joint NAMMCO/JCNB Disturbance Workshop:

- **(High priority)** The regional aerial survey of the east side of Smith Sound be the minimum area that should be covered for monitoring walrus abundance and distribution. Surveys should occur in April, annually during the first 3 years of production, to allow detection of any substantial changes.
- The satellite imagery of Wolstenholme Fjord be collected annually to determine walrus density, and eventually walrus counts if <30 cm resolution imagery becomes available.

- The telemetry data on walrus habitat use, distribution and migration patterns be combined with a study of benthos covering the foraging areas in Wolstenholme Fjord to improve the assessment of the relative importance of the potential foraging area impacted by the mining operation (disturbance and siltification).
- The SC also recommended that Greenland invite Canadian experts to participate in reviewing monitoring programmes, plans and results.

Comments from Member Countries

Greenland acknowledged the recommendations for research. Greenland informed that a new Executive Order on walrus had come into place in October 2022.

MCSW Conclusion

The MCSW noted the update from the Scientific Committee and agreed to propose to Council that request R-2.6.3 be closed.

The MCSW also agreed to forward to Greenland the research recommendations proposed by the SC.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

5. CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chair thanked the chair of SC and the participants for their attendance and contributions.

The meeting was closed at 14:30 on 1 March 2023.

6. ADOPTION OF REPORT

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

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Jana Djukaric (Intern)
Charlotte Winsnes (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 Seal Stocks**
 - 3.1. Bearded seals**
 - 3.2. Ringed seals**
 - 3.3. Grey seals & Harbour seals**
 - 3.4. Harp seals & Hooded seals**
 - 3.5. Walrus**
- 4. Update on Members Responses to Proposals for Conservation and Management**
- 5. Any Other Business**