



NAMMCO ANNUAL MEETING 31

MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUS

19 March 2024, 14:10-17:10
Hotel Reykjavík Grand, Reykjavík, Iceland

DRAFT ANNOTATED AGENDA

Annotations are indicated in *blue italics*. Recommendations by SC/30 are listed in the Appendix.

1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

Relevant documents for this meeting:

NAMMCO/31/08: Report of the 30th Meeting of the Scientific Committee

NAMMCO/31/MC/05: Recent Proposals for Conservation and Management and Research Recommendations

NAMMCO/31/MC/06: Summary of Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee and Responses by the Scientific Committee

The meeting will focus on:

- *Reviewing the new information on seal species and walrus and responses to active requests for advice provided by the Scientific Committee during its last meeting in 2024 (SC/30).*
- *Considering both the new and reiterated proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research (that have implications for stock assessment and require management action by Member Countries) made by SC/30.*
- *Considering updates from the member countries on the proposals for conservation and management measures discussed by MC 30.*
- *Determining whether any requests may be considered completed and closed or need to be renewed.*

The MCSW is specifically asked to discuss and decide whether to:

- *Endorse the SC proposals for conservation and management,*
- *Endorse the SC recommendations for research,*
- *Make recommendation to Council regarding the status of some requests,*
- *Propose to Council new requests to the Scientific Committee.*

*The relevant **requests** (and year they were formulated) are given under the respective agenda items.*

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEALS AND WALRUS STOCKS

3.1 BEARDED SEAL

NAMMCO/31/08, item 9.1

3.1.1 Active request

- **R-2.7.1 (renewed 2023, ongoing)** to complete its review and assessment of bearded seals no later than 2024.

3.1.2 Response from SC/30

A NAMMCO Panarctic Bearded Seal Workshop (BSWS) was held online on 21-23 March 2023, with the purpose of reviewing new information since 2010 and, based on all the information available, assessing the status and trends of the species throughout its range and identify threats and critical knowledge gaps.

R-2.7.1: There are insufficient data available to conduct a robust assessment. The meeting of the Bearded Seal Working Group, originally planned for 2024, should be postponed until sufficient data become available.

3.1.3 Recommendations for Research

See Recommendations 1–4.

3.1.4 MCSW Discussion

3.2 RINGED SEAL

NAMMCO/31/08, item 9.2

3.2.1 Active request

- **R-2.3.3 (renewed 2023, ongoing)** to complete its review and assessment of ringed seals no later than 2024.

3.2.2 Response from SC/30

A NAMMCO Working Group on Ringed Seals (RSWG) was held online on 16 and 27 November 2023.

R-2.3.3: There were insufficient data to conduct a full assessment. Some Management Areas were suggested.

3.2.3 Recommendations for Conservation and Management

See Recommendation 5.

3.2.4 Recommendations for Research

See Recommendations 6–14.

3.2.1 MCSW Discussion

3.3 HARBOUR & GREY SEALS

NAMMCO/31/08, item 9.3

3.3.1 Active requests

- **R-2.4.2 (renewed 2019, ongoing)** to provide a new assessment of grey seal stocks throughout the North Atlantic.
- **R-2.5.2 (renewed 2019, ongoing)** to conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour seals in all NAMMCO areas as soon as feasible.

3.3.2 Response from SC/30

The NAMMCO Working Group on Coastal Seals met at the Greenland Representation in Copenhagen (Denmark) in May 2023.

R-2.4.2 and R-2.5.2: Trends in abundance were examined for both species, but no assessment was conducted for either.

3.3.3 Recommendations for Conservation and Management

See Recommendations 15–24.

3.3.4 Recommendations for Research

See Recommendations 25–37.

3.3.5 Proposal for rephrasing Request R-2.4.2, so it is aligned with R-2.5.2

The SC requests that R-2.4.2 be reformulated to match the language of R-2.5.2 and specify that North Atlantic refers to NAMMCO areas in this context.

3.3.6 MCSW Discussion

3.4 HARP & HOODED SEALS

NAMMCO/31/08, item 9.4

3.4.1 Active requests:

- **R-2.1.4 (2003, standing)** to regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and hooded seals as new information becomes available.
- **R-2.1.9 (revised 2022, ongoing)** to investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline of Greenland Sea stock of hooded seals; and assess the status of the stock.
- **R-2.1.10 (revised 2019, standing)** to provide advice on the total allowable catches for the management of harp seals.

3.4.2 Response from SC/30

The Benchmark Workshop for Harp & Hooded Seals met in May 2023 and the Joint ICES/NAFO/NAMMCO Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals (WGHARP) met in August 2023. The benchmark was tasked with evaluating proposed developments to the assessment model used for two stocks of harp seals (East Ice [White Sea/Barents Sea] and West Ice [Greenland]) and one stock of hooded seals (West Ice [Greenland]) in the Northeast Atlantic. The main objective of the WGHARP was to review recent surveys of Greenland Sea harp and hooded seal pup production and examine harvest scenarios for these populations as well as harp seals in the White Sea.

R-2.1.9: The SC discussed possible reasons for the apparent decline, but these need to be verified with data.

R-2.1.4 and R-2.1.10: The population models proved too sensitive to prior assumptions and could not be used to explore harvest scenarios.

3.4.3 Recommendations for Research

See Recommendations 38–41.

3.5 WALRUS

3.5.1 Recommendations for Conservation and Management

See Recommendation 42.

4. UPDATE ON MEMBERS' RESPONSES TO PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

NAMMCO/31/MC/06

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

APPENDIX TO MCSW AGENDA: SC/30 RECOMMENDATIONS

This list contains the recommendations endorsed by SC/30, grouped first by agenda item, then by type of recommendation, and finally by Party to which they are addressed. This includes recommendations given by Workshops and Working Groups, as well as the SC itself. Recommendations *prioritised by SC/30* are noted as such. “Recommendations for Research” refers only to those recommendations with implications for stock assessment and/or managers in Member Countries.

3.1 BEARDED SEAL

Recommendations for Research

All Parties

1. Make efforts to collect more samples and increase coverage for the circumpolar genetic analyses.
2. Continue and expand screening for pathogens in bearded seals.

Greenland

3. Obtain tracking data from bearded seals tagged in Greenland and East Baffin Island to get information on stock structures (*prioritised by SC/30*).
4. West Greenland and Melville Bay (key hunting areas) as major priority, to get abundance estimates.

3.2. RINGED SEAL

Recommendations for Conservation and Management

Greenland

5. Validate catch numbers (*prioritised by SC/30*).

Recommendations for Research

All Parties

6. Use genetic and telemetry data only from adult ringed seals or nursing pups sampled during the breeding season for population structure studies (*prioritised by SC/30*).
7. Conduct partial surveys of ringed seals (as index) (*prioritised by SC/30*).
8. Ensure that efforts to determine population structure be continued (*prioritised by SC/30*).
9. Carry out new studies to gain more insight on correction factors for ringed seal abundance estimates.
10. Study the sensitivity of ringed seals to noise, particularly in areas of high ship traffic or tourism activities.

Greenland

11. Carry out a new survey of the Kangia seals in spring 2024 to get a new abundance estimate and report this to the next SC meeting (*prioritised by SC/30*).
12. Monitor selected fjord systems with and without catches to assess the effects of hunting, disturbance, and climate change on ringed seals (*prioritised by SC/30*).
13. Collect more telemetry and genetic data southwest of Baffin Island and in Lancaster Sound to delineate the boundary between the management areas west of Greenland.
14. Carry out aerial surveys to estimate ringed seal abundances in East Greenland.

3.3 HARBOUR & GREY SEALS

Recommendations for Conservation & Management

All Parties

15. Complete an assessment for coastal seals in each of the NAMMCO member countries as soon as the necessary data are available.

Faroe Islands

16. Determine management objectives for the grey seal population in line with the NAMMCO precautionary principles.

Greenland

17. According to NAMMCO principles, harbour seal stocks should be at least at 60% of the equilibrium level before any hunting can take place. As the equilibrium level is unknown for all Greenland populations the MSY-level could be used, as it is a close proxy to 60% that can be achieved in a shorter term than the equilibrium level.
18. If a harbour seal colony is the closest neighbour to a formerly significant but now abandoned breeding/moulting site, no hunting should be allowed until after the neighbouring breeding/moulting site has been recolonised and an assessment can show a sustainable catch.
19. All known harbour seal populations should be allowed to increase.

Iceland

20. Put forward a management plan for both harbour and grey seals, which should include: Re-evaluation of the target population level objective with the new level being based on biological criteria; When setting catch levels, consider total anthropogenic removals (including direct hunt and by-catch); Biennial surveys for both species.
21. Make legislation on seal hunting species-specific.
22. Continue efforts to reduce by-catch.
23. Further develop mitigation measures to reduce anthropogenic disturbances from tourists on harbour seals. Consider restricting access for people to important areas for harbour seals during the breeding period.

Norway

24. Management plans should take total anthropogenic removals into account.

Recommendations for Research with implications for Parties

All Parties

25. Support the development of a Europe wide population model for grey seals through data provision and cooperation.
26. Support a joint effort to deliver samples for genetic analysis of grey seals to improve knowledge on population structure and status.

Faroe Islands

27. Continue the summer counts for abundance estimations of grey seals, and conduct monitoring of haul-out and breeding sites as well as additional tracking.

Greenland

28. Continue the monitoring of the three known harbour seal populations, together with local hunters.
29. Regularly check on previously used harbour seal breeding/moulting sites.

Iceland

30. Continue efforts to develop population models for both species, assess whether data on biological parameters (e.g., historical population size, changes in carrying capacity over time) from other areas can be used for this, and collect data on biological parameters from Icelandic seals to the extent that it is necessary (*prioritised by SC/30*).
31. Continue investigating habitat use of both species using satellite telemetry to help evaluate co-occurrence with fisheries and risk of by-catch.
32. Carry out biannual surveys of grey seals.

Norway

33. Improve knowledge on by-catches by collecting data on species, genetics, and age by collecting jaws from by-caught seals in the reference fleet.
34. Collect data on by-catches in recreational fisheries.
35. Conduct further tracking studies of coastal seals along the Norwegian coast, to obtain better knowledge on seal movements.
36. Continue efforts to implement the Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) system on Norwegian vessels to estimate drop-out rates and supplement existing by-catch data.
37. Complete the analysis of DNA samples from harbour seal pups in Norway to help determine stock structure and propose more scientifically based management units.

3.4 HARP AND HOODED SEALS

Recommendations for Research

All Parties

38. Efforts should continue to obtain reproductive samples. These are required for use in the population model.

Norway

39. Tag more harp and hooded seals in the Greenland Sea and the Denmark Strait, and to reanalyse satellite tagging data from the past for both species (*prioritised by SC/30*).
40. New pup aerial survey of harp seals in the White Sea (Action by 2024)
41. Satellite imaging studies should be undertaken of the White Sea\Barents Sea harp seal population during the pupping season, to suggest possible re-distribution of the seals outside traditional whelping patches (Action by 2025)

3.5 WALRUS

Recommendations for Conservation & Management

Greenland

42. Consider the advice from the 2018 assessment valid until a new assessment is carried out in 2026.