

**Council of NAMMCO - Opening Statement**  
**Martha Rojas Urrego**  
**Executive Secretary, International Whaling Commission**  
**March 2024**

I am very pleased to join this annual meeting of the Council of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission on behalf of the International Whaling Commission, as its new Executive Secretary.

Our two organisations share a common mission of cetacean science and stewardship. There are several important areas of collaboration and I welcome the increased cooperation of recent years.

I would particularly like to thank the NAMMCO members who are also valued members of the IWC Scientific Committee. I look forward to welcoming you to Bled, Slovenia, for our next meeting this April.

Every meeting of the Scientific Committee provides invaluable advice on many topics and this year there will be a particular focus on Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling stocks. This scientific advice is absolutely pivotal to the Commission which adopted a new process to better manage its responsibilities regarding aboriginal subsistence whaling. The new process will be used for the first time this year.

Also as part of our role overseeing Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling, the IWC maintains records of historical and modern whale catches. This database relies on contributions to remain up-to-date and maintain its efficacy, and we thank NAMMCO members for their help in this.

Data-sharing is also evident in the production of abundance estimates, which, of course, provide the crucial foundations for our work and our decision-making. Both the IWC and NAMMCO maintain tables of approved abundance estimates, and increased cooperation is achieving consistency between the two.

Welfare issues are also extremely important to both our organisations. In previous years, the sharing of best practice and educational tools was welcomed and greatly valued at the IWC, and I hope we can continue to collaborate here, and ensure that the best advice and training is available to all our members.

Our collaborative efforts are also necessarily extending into areas outside the immediate influence of our two organisations. The scale and range of threats to whale stocks is increasing. Progress is only possible on issues such as ship strikes, pollution and climate change with multi-disciplinary co-operation, working across many different fora to ensure that the health of our oceans and their cetacean populations are part of any decision making. Bycatch is the greatest single threat to cetaceans and both NAMMCO's BYCELS and IWC's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative are working with the fishery sector to expand efforts to monitor and mitigate bycatch.

As the new Executive Secretary, I will look for every opportunity to build upon these collaborative efforts. My IWC colleagues and I look forward to the discussions over the next two days, and I look forward to meeting those of you who will be attending the Scientific Committee in April, and our biennial Commission meeting, which takes place in Lima, Peru in September.

Thank you Chair.