



## NAMMCO ANNUAL MEETING 31

19-21 March 2024

Hotel Reykjavík Grand, Reykjavík, Iceland

## MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

<b>DOCUMENT 12</b>	<b>LIST OF PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT, AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS TO PARTIES</b>
<b>Submitted by</b>	Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC), the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW) and the Joint Management Committee (MCJ)
<b>Action requested</b>	To adopt
<b>Background</b>	<p>This document contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New proposals for conservation and management approved by the Management Committees</li> <li>• New research recommendations to parties approved by the Management Committees</li> <li>• Recommendations that were not approved by the Management Committees</li> </ul>

## 1. NEW PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT FORWARDED TO PARTIES

### 1.1 ALL PARTIES

#### Harbour and grey seals

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

#### White-sided dolphin

- *Considering the low levels of reported catch compared to the estimated population size, a new assessment might be conducted within the standard 5-year period, integrating the 2024 abundance estimate, full catch reporting, and validated age structure information.*

### 1.2 MULTIPLE PARTIES

#### White-sided dolphin

- *Maintain total removals below 750 white-sided dolphins per year across Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands.*

### 1.3 FAROE ISLANDS

#### Harbour and grey seals

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

#### White-sided dolphin

- *Validate the completeness of the Faroese white-sided dolphin catches, focusing on the apparent lack of juveniles in the catch.*

### 1.4 GREENLAND

#### Ringed seal

- *Validate catch numbers.*

#### Harbour and grey seals

- *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.*
- *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.*
- *All known harbour seal populations should be allowed to increase.*

#### Walrus

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

**Narwhal**

- i) Acknowledging the serious concern regarding the status of narwhal and beluga in East Greenland, as pointed out in the letter of concern by the Scientific Committee,
  - ii) recognising the importance of issues related to food security in the remote areas in all Management Areas in East Greenland, and
  - iii) adhering to the 8 precautionary principles adopted by NAMMCO 30,
- the MCC **urge** Greenland to implement a management approach to narwhal and beluga stocks in East Greenland aiming at zero quotas, to ensure the long-term sustainability of these stocks.

**Beluga**

See Narwhal (above).

**White-beaked dolphin**

- *Validate the Greenlandic removals with a special focus on minimising underreporting and estimating struck and lost rates, thus facilitating a full assessment of white-beaked dolphins as soon as possible.*

**Northern bottlenose whale**

- *Validate the reported catches of this species, as there appears to be misreporting.*

**1.5 ICELAND****Harbour and grey seals**

- *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.*
- *Make legislation on seal hunting species-specific.*
- *Continue efforts to reduce by-catch.*
- *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.*

**1.6 NORWAY****Harbour and grey seals**

- *Management plans should take total anthropogenic removals into account.*

**2. NEW RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS FORWARDED TO PARTIES****2.1 ALL COUNTRIES****Bearded seal**

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

**Ringed seal**

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

#### **Harbour and grey seals**

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

#### **Harp and hooded seals**

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

#### **White-beaked and white-sided dolphins**

- *To deploy satellite tags on both white-sided and white-beaked dolphins, preferably in areas other than the Faroe Islands, to obtain more movement and dispersion data.*

## **2.2 FAROE ISLANDS**

#### **Harbour and grey seals**

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

#### **White-sided dolphin**

- *Investigate if there is older (i.e., 1986–1992) existing biological material from the Faroe Islands that could be processed and analysed, and to continue collecting relevant samples to investigate reproduction parameters and age structure.*
- *Collect eye lenses to explore alternative age-determination methods.*
- *Collect information from stranded animals, including age, length, and sex data.*
- *Program satellite transmitters to collect higher resolution dive data at shallow depths to allow aerial survey availability correction factors to be estimated.*

## **2.3 GREENLAND**

#### **Bearded seal**

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

#### **Ringed seal**

- *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.*

- *Monitor selected fjord systems with and without catches to assess the effects of hunting, disturbance, and climate change on ringed seals.*
- *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.*
- *Carry out aerial surveys to estimate ringed seal abundances in East Greenland.*

#### **Harbour and grey seals**

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

#### **Narwhal**

- *Deploy satellite tags on animals supplying the spring hunt in Management Area 1, as well as in Northeast Greenland, to investigate the range of the animals supplying the spring hunt.*
- *Collect biological samples when available from East Greenland, including areas north of Scoresby Sound, to explore genetic connectivity of different stocks.*
- *Investigate alternative methods to monitor depleted stocks (e.g., using targeted aerial surveys, passive acoustic monitoring, land-based surveys, mark-recapture, collecting incidental observations).*
- *Conduct targeted aerial surveys of Kangerlussuaq, Nansen Fjord, southern Scoresby Sound, and other reported aggregation areas during summer of 2026.*

#### **Beluga**

- *Collect incidental observations and biological samples when available, to monitor the occurrence of belugas in East Greenland.*

#### **White-beaked dolphin**

- *Determine the stock identity of white-beaked dolphins in West Greenland, using increased genetic sampling and tagging efforts in Greenland.*
- *To collect life history and age data from Greenland.*

## **2.4 ICELAND**

#### **Harbour and grey seals**

- *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.*
- *Continue investigating habitat use of both species using satellite telemetry to help evaluate co-occurrence with fisheries and risk of by-catch.*
- *Carry out biannual surveys of grey seals.*

#### **Harbour porpoise**

- *Collect data on biological parameters, to facilitate an assessment of the Icelandic stock.*

#### **White-beaked dolphin**

- *Make existing and newly collected biological data (age and reproductive information) from Iceland available for the next assessment.*

## 2.5 NORWAY

### Harbour and grey seals

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

### Harp and hooded seals

- *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.*
- *New pup aerial survey of harp seals in the White Sea.*
- *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.*

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS NOT FORWARDED TO PARTIES DUE TO LACK OF CONSENSUS

### Narwhal

- *Zero catches should be allowed in all three Management Areas.*
- *The next assessment of each Management Area should be conducted in 2026.*

### Beluga

- *Zero removals should be allowed, in order to allow for the potential establishment of a new population of belugas in East Greenland, and to avoid removing animals that have potentially originated from the small and protected Svalbard stock.*
- *The next assessment should coincide with the next narwhal assessment.*