



JOINT MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

19 March 2024

Hotel Reykjavík Grand, Reykjavík, Iceland

REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Chair’s opening remarks.....	4
2. Adoption of Agenda	4
3. Environmental and Ecosystem perspective	4
3.1 Marine Mammal–Fishery Interactions.....	4
3.2 Environmental issues	6
3.3 Multispecies approach to management and modelling	6
4. Update on members’ responses to proposals for Conservation and Management	7
5. Presentation of SC long-Term plan for stock assessment	7
6. WG on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making.....	7
7. Any Other Business	8
8. Close of meeting	9
9. Adoption of Report	9
Appendix 1: Participant List	10
Appendix 2: Joint List of Documents of the Management Committees.....	12
Appendix 3: Agenda	13

1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ), Masaana Dorph (Greenland), welcomed participants (listed in Appendix 1) to the meeting. He noted that NAMMCO Deputy Secretary Maria Garagouni would act as main rapporteur, with support from the Secretariat.

The Chair noted that all the meeting documents (Appendix 2) had been made available on the NAMMCO website two weeks prior to the meeting, and drew particular attention to the following documents as relevant for all agenda items:

- *NAMMCO/31/MC/05: List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research generated by the MCs at their 2023 meeting, with Responses from the Parties.*
- *NAMMCO/31/MC/06: List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee.*
- *NAMMCO/31/08: Scientific Committee Report.*

The Chair noted that Parties had been invited to submit updates in writing on advances towards the implementation of previous proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research in writing prior to the meeting. The received updates were reflected in document NAMMCO/31/MC/05.

The Chair informed that the joint meeting addresses issues of relevance to both the Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC) and the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW) and indicated that this meeting would focus on:

- Reviewing updates 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 (2023).
- Determining whether any requests may be considered completed and closed or need to be renewed.
- Discussing the progress of the Working Group on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG).

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The Agenda (Appendix 3), which had been circulated to participants on March 4th, was adopted without modification.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

3.1 MARINE MAMMAL–FISHERY INTERACTIONS

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- ***R-1.1.5 (1997, standing as of 2014)*** *To periodically review and update available knowledge related to the understanding of interactions between marine mammals and commercially exploited marine resources.*
- ***R-1.1.9 (2022, ongoing but not prioritised as of 2023)*** *In addressing the standing request on ecosystem modelling and marine mammal fisheries interaction, to extend the focus to include all areas under NAMMCO jurisdiction.*

- **R-1.1.10 (2022, standing as of 2023)** *In light of the distributional shifts seen under T-NASS 2007 and later surveys, the SC should investigate dynamic changes in spatial distribution due to ecosystem changes and functional responses.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

The Chair invited Sandra Granquist, Vice Chair of the Scientific Committee, to present updates from SC/30.

In response to R-1.1.5, SC/21 had established a Working Group on By-Catch (BYCWG), with the following Terms of Reference (ToRs):

- Identify all fisheries with potential by-catch of marine mammals;
- Review and evaluate current by-catch estimates for marine mammals in NAMMCO countries;
- If necessary, provide advice on improved data collection and estimation methods to obtain best estimates of total by-catch over time.

Until recently, the WG has focussed on ToR ii, but was asked by SC/28 (2022) to proceed with ToR i and determine how best to assess the risk of marine mammal by-catch in fisheries taking place in the waters of NAMMCO and for which there are no by-catch estimates and no (or limited) by-catch monitoring.

The BYCWG held its 8th meeting online in October 2023 to discuss ways forward, with the aim of formulating a data call to the four Parties. The data from this call will be used to quantify the individual exposure of marine mammals to being by-caught—defining the population consequences of by-catch is within the remit of the species and assessment WGs. During this meeting, the BYCWG identified certain information gaps that would need to be filled in by the Parties prior to the submission of the full data call, namely:

1. Is there a *fleet register*, sorted by: *port*, *vessel size* or *gear type*
2. Are *recreational vessels* registered/licensed and is there information on their *gear type* and *fishing effort/number of trips*
3. At what *spatial resolution* is fishing effort recorded, sorted by *vessel size*
4. What data are available for *smaller vessels* (i.e., those under 12 m in Norway, under 15 GT in Faroe Islands, under 90 GT in Greenland)
5. Are there records of the number or percentage of *foreign vessels* operating in the national fishing areas
6. What *monitoring programs* exist, and what is the *objective of each program*, e.g., policing or counting protected species by-catch the *monitoring protocol*, i.e., precisely what is being monitored and how.

The BYCWG agreed that, following the collection of this information, the formal data call will be circulated to the Fishery Departments of the four Countries, and that a cooperation with the ICES WG on By-Catch will be sought. The Secretariat requested the above information from the Fishery Departments, but at the time of the SC meeting, Iceland had not yet responded.

Regarding R-1.1.9, the SC acknowledges the request and will continue to monitor the development of ecosystem modelling approaches.

In response to R-1.1.10, the results of the upcoming NASS 2024 survey will provide further insights relevant to changes in the spatial distribution of cetacean species. The SC recognises the value of such a spatial modelling exercise, but it will require dedicated effort and likely additional funding.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

The SC recommended that Iceland provide an answer to the Secretariat's request for information as soon as possible, so the BYCWG could proceed with the data call.

This recommendation is now considered fulfilled, as Iceland provided an answer prior to the meeting of the MCJ.

Comments from Parties

There were no comments from the Parties.

The Chair urged the Parties to ensure that their respective Fishery Departments respond promptly to the formal data call as soon as it is circulated by the Secretariat.

3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-1.5.3 (2016, standing as of 2023)** *To monitor the development of the Mary River Project [on Baffin Island] and assess qualitatively or, if possible, quantitatively the likely impact and consequences on marine mammals in the [NAMMCO] area.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

Some answers to this request were provided by the Joint NAMMCO-JCNB Disturbance Workshop in December 2022. The SC recommended that the Joint NAMMCO-JCNB Working Group (JWG) follow up on further updates at its next meeting.

Comments from Parties

Greenland reiterated comments made in previous years, noting their deep concern about the Canadian Baffinland Mary River mining project, as well as the mining and shipping activities in Wolstenholme Fjord in North Greenland (Qaanaaq area); should these activities start again, they will impact marine mammals in the broader area. These projects have a particularly strong impact on the wintering stock of walrus in the area and the autumn migration of beluga. Greenland also noted that human-caused disturbances might have stronger negative effects on these animals than direct removals do.

3.3 MULTISPECIES APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT AND MODELLING

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-1.2.1 (renewed 2019, ongoing but not prioritised as of 2023)** *To consider whether multispecies models for management purposes can be established for the North Atlantic ecosystems and whether such models could include the marine mammal compartment. If such models and the required data are not available, then identify the knowledge lacking for such an enterprise to be beneficial to proper scientific management and suggest scientific projects which would be required for obtaining this knowledge.*
- **R-1.2.2 (1995, standing)** *In relation to the importance of the further development of multispecies approaches to the management of marine resources, to monitor stock levels and trends in stocks of all marine mammals in the North Atlantic.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

In response to R-1.2.1, SC members involved in multi-species ecosystem modelling projects will update the list of projects being carried out (provided to SC/27) for the next SC meeting, as well as provide information on the uncertainty or reliability of these models.

Pursuant to R-1.2.2, the SC monitors and reviews information on stock levels for all marine mammal species within the NAMMCO remit.

Comments from Parties

There were no comments from the Parties.

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

The Chair informed that updates from Parties on recent proposals for conservation and management and research recommendations were available in document NAMMCO/30/MC/05, noting that there was only one proposal forwarded to Parties by MC 30, specifically to Greenland on the topic of Environmental Issues, and that updates were provided prior to the meeting.

Greenland reiterated concerns about the Mary River project on Baffin Island, and mentioned, additionally, that if the mining in Wolstenholme Fjord (Northwest Greenland) is to commence again, the concerns about the ecosystem and marine mammals therein are the same.

5. PRESENTATION OF SC LONG-TERM PLAN FOR STOCK ASSESSMENT

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-1.6.8 (2023, ongoing)** *To prepare a tentative long-term plan (10–15 years) for the assessments of all the stocks within the remit of NAMMCO.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee and Comments from Parties

The SC have drafted a long-term plan for stock assessments over the next 15 years, which was presented to the MCJ along with the short-term plan for Working Group meetings in 2024–2026. The Chair invited the Parties to consider if there are specific national reporting requirements or other concerns that should be put forward to the Council during its decision to adopt (or not) these plans.

Greenland noted with regret that some of the planned WG meetings (including for narwhal and walrus) have been postponed, which will have an effect on how soon any relevant management advice will be provided on these species. The postponement of the NAMMCO-JCNB JWG as well means that there will be no advice for Northern Greenland in the immediate future either. While Greenland understood that Canada's request to postpone the meeting must be grounded on practical reasons, they were concerned about having to wait for new recommendations, especially for Northern Greenland.

The Chair called on Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid, SC Chair, to clarify the reasons for the postponements. The SC Chair explained that there are plans for a new walrus survey in 2025, and that existing data from 2022 (see report of the MCSW, item 3.5) have not yet been analysed. As a result, the necessary data for the assessment will not be available until 2026. Existing abundance data for narwhal and beluga will also need to be analysed prior to the next meeting of the JWG.

6. WG ON ENHANCING USER INVOLVEMENT IN NAMMCO DECISION MAKING

Report of the UIWG

The Chair invited Granquist to present the report of the UIWG.

NAMMCO Council 29 (2022) endorsed the recommendation of the MCJ to establish a working group to enhance user involvement in NAMMCO decision making, acknowledging the importance of including diverse knowledge systems in management processes. The NAMMCO WG on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG) has held three online meetings since then (June 2023, January and March 2024). The UIWG participants agreed that a tentative workplan could not be made yet, as the UIWG needs to discuss further the workflow, organisation, and structure of the group before outlining a comprehensive workplan. The WG agreed, however, that the approach shall be species and country specific.

Comments from Parties

Greenland informed that their Parliament approved a new law in June 2023 on hunting, and one of the paragraphs therein relates to user knowledge. In decision making processes, the Cabinet needs to take into account both the usual biological advice and the available user knowledge. The department is also drafting a new Executive Order on the collection of user/hunter knowledge. This is a very important step for Greenland, in that user knowledge needs to be formally included in the decision-making process. The work is developing, although perhaps not at the tempo they wish; however, it is progressing and is a concrete step forward.

Iceland asked for clarification on the Greenlandic process, namely, to what degree users are involved, noting that this might impact the work done within NAMMCO. Greenland stated that, in the current system, the background for decision making has been the science, whereas now the user knowledge has to be taken into account, e.g., with respect to quotas, new Executive Orders, or other regulations related to hunting. The Executive Order itself is still in the drafting process, but as of now it seems it will take into account user knowledge on behaviours, seasonality, migration patterns, and changes related to climate change—essentially, all hunter knowledge that is accumulated through being in the field for 12 months a year.

Norway commented that the UIWG had indeed discussed potential ways forward, and attempted to define how different stakeholders are going to be included at different stages of the decision-making process. Norway further noted that there is an important distinction to be made between user *involvement* (involving different stakeholders directly) and user *knowledge*.

Greenland further informed that hunters in settlements in East and North Greenland, were interviewed on nine topics (e.g., when marine mammals arrive to/leave an area, whether there are calves, etc.). There will be a report resulting from these consultations, and this could be used by the Cabinet, organisations, decision makers, etc. One of these reports summarising the observations of the hunters in pilot studies on narwhal and beluga carried out in Tasiilaq (2019), and Ittoqqortoormiit and Qaanaaq (2020), was presented by KNAPK at the NAMMCO 28 MCC meeting in 2021. The presentation can be found among the [NAMMCO 28 MCC Meeting Documents](#). Moreover, as KNAPK mentioned in its opening statement, the organisation is in the process of creating a user knowledge database, where the information will be collected, structured, organised, and reported in such a manner as to enable organisations and the Cabinet to use these data. Greenland pointed out that the UIWG is still in the early phases, and that it is not yet clear how user involvement is to be applied in practice nor how the group should be organised. This process requires considerable effort and should be the focus of the UIWG. Greenland's opinion is that, while hunters should greatly contribute to this process, user knowledge extends beyond the accounts of the hunters themselves.

The MCJ discussed the procedure to appoint a chair for the UIWG, given that the WG currently has no chair. Norway, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands agreed it would be beneficial for the UIWG to have an external chair, but Greenland is not in favour.

MCJ Conclusion

The MCJ **agreed** that the selection of the chair should be made by the UIWG. The Heads of Delegation will provide guidance to the UIWG to facilitate the appointment of an appropriate candidate. In the meantime, the Secretariat will act as chair.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed.

8. CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chair thanked the participants for their attendance and contributions. The participants thanked the Chair for his able chairing.

9. ADOPTION OF REPORT

A draft of the report was provisionally adopted on 21 March 2024. This was later finalised by correspondence and adopted on 5 April 2024.

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APPENDIX 2: JOINT LIST OF DOCUMENTS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Reference	Title	Agenda item
NAMMCO/31/08	Scientific Committee Report	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/31/MC/01	Joint list of Documents for the Management Committees	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/31/MCJ/02	Draft Annotated Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/31/MCC/03	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/31/MCSW/04	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW)	MCSW
NAMMCO/31/MC/05	List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research generated by the MCs at their 2023 meeting, with Responses from the Parties	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/31/MC/06	List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/31/MC/07	Report of the WG on User Knowledge	MCJ
NAMMCO/31/MC/08	List of Participants	MCJ, MCC, MCSW

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. Environmental and Ecosystem perspective**
 - 3.1 Marine Mammal–Fishery Interactions
 - 3.2 Environmental Issues
 - 3.3 Multispecies approach to management and modelling
- 4. Update on members' responses to proposals for Conservation and Management**
- 5. Presentation of SC long-term plan for Stock Assessment**
- 6. WG on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG)**
- 7. Any other business**