



# 31<sup>st</sup> MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

19-21 March 2024

*Hotel Reykjavík Grand, Reykjavík, Iceland (also streamed)*

## COUNCIL REPORT



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## **1. OPENING PROCEDURES**

### **1.1 WELCOME ADDRESS**

The Chair of the Council, Jón Þrándur Stefansson (Iceland), welcomed participants and invited guests (Appendix 1: List of Participants, and [NAMMCO/31/01](#)) to the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of NAMMCO and to Reykjavík, his home city.

The Chair announced the Theme Session that intended to dwell on the specificity of welfare issues in marine mammal hunting, a topic that has come up in recent years, particularly in Iceland. Invited speakers Kathrine Ryeng (DVM, Norway) and Snjólaug Árnadóttir (PhD in Law, Iceland) were asked to reflect on issues associated with the hunting of marine mammals, with regards to animal welfare and legal aspects respectively, and how best to deal with those. The Chair expressed his hope that the opening talks would be followed by a constructive and lively discussion.

### **1.2 ADMISSION OF OBSERVERS**

On behalf of the Council, the Chair welcomed and thanked the observers (Appendix 1: List of Participants and [NAMMCO/31/01](#)) from Japan, the United States (USA), Makivvik Corporation, the Arctic Council Working Group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Association of Fishers and Hunters in Greenland (KNAPK), and the World Conservation Trust (IWMC). The Norwegian delegation was observing for the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO).

The Chair noted that the IWC and the IWMC could not be present physically but would be following the meeting online.

Apologies were received from Canada, the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, Northeast Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS); the Directorate-General for the Environment, European Commission; the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO); the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, Nordic Council of Ministers; and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

### **1.3 OPENING STATEMENTS**

The Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, and Norway as well as Japan, the United States, Makivvik Corporation, CAFF, IWC, KNAPK, and IWMC provided opening statements (Appendix 4: Opening Statements).

### **1.4 ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

The agenda ([NAMMCO/31/02](#), Appendix 2: Agenda) was adopted without amendments. Supporting documents to the meeting ([NAMMCO/31/03](#)) are listed in Appendix 3: List of Documents. All documents can be found under [Council Meetings](#) on the NAMMCO website.

### **1.5 MEETING ARRANGEMENTS**

The Chair informed that the agenda Items were planned to be addressed according to the schedule of the meeting, and any changes would be duly announced, so the online participants could more easily follow. He presented the meeting arrangements and extended an invitation from Iceland to an icebreaker at the end of the meeting day and to a virtual excursion and a dinner on Wednesday evening.

The General Secretary, Geneviève Desportes, joined in welcoming all the participants to the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting and to Reykjavík and presented the meeting practicalities. She also reminded the participants that the Secretariat staff were available during the meeting should anyone require assistance.

## **1.6 THEME SESSION ‘WELFARE ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH MARINE MAMMAL HUNTING’**

Kathrine Ryeng (DVM, PhD, Scientist at the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research) and Snjólaug Árnadóttir (PhD in Public International Law, Associate Professor at Reykjavík University) were invited to present their views on welfare issues associated with the hunting of marine mammals, the former focussing on animal welfare and the latter on legal aspects. They were also asked to share their thoughts on how progress in both areas could be supported.

Ryeng’s main area is research and advice on animal welfare in marine mammals, particularly related to hunting and killing methods, but also non-hunting anthropogenic threats to marine mammals, such as by-catch/entanglement of large whales, whale watching, and more. Árnadóttir is a Lecturer in, among others, Environmental Law, Public International Law, and Law of the Sea, and her research is primarily in the field of international law, law of the sea, and environmental law. She is also a member of the Working Group appointed by the Icelandic Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries in February 2024 to assess relevant administrative and international law with a view to updating the Icelandic whaling legislation.

Ryeng’s presentation was entitled “Animal welfare in Marine Mammal Hunting”. She reminded the audience that marine mammal hunting most often takes place in uncontrolled conditions under challenging circumstances, a rough environment and moving targets. As for any method of slaughtering/killing animals, animal welfare in terms of protecting the animal from pain and suffering is a key issue for hunting. This implies avoiding suffering or minimising the duration of suffering such that the time to bring about unconsciousness is as short as possible (TTD). Different killing strategies for slaughtered livestock and groups of hunted mammals were presented and their performance in terms of animal welfare were compared. Ryeng focused on the Norwegian pack-ice harp seal rifle hunt and modern whaling with explosive harpoon grenade. In NAMMCO member countries, minke, fin, humpback, and bowhead whales are hunted using three types of whale cannons firing harpoons equipped with different versions of the explosive grenade “Whale Grenade-99”. Important prerequisites for the best animal welfare outcomes in seal hunting and modern whaling were highlighted. These included well maintained and prepared weapons and back-up weapons of suitable power for the target species. Ryeng underlined that a robust welfare assessment of the hunt should be performed by independent observers, monitoring shooting events as well as collecting ante-mortem and post-mortem data to quantify the effectiveness of the killing. She provided comparative data for terrestrial and marine mammals, as well as slaughterhouses.

Árnadóttir’s presentation on “Whaling and Animal Welfare under International Law” began with an overview of domestic law governing whaling in Iceland, and recent events leading to a decision to review the legislation. She then continued with an overview of whaling and animal welfare regulations and reviewed the status of international laws covering the three main legal approaches to animals: species protection (flourishing), animal welfare (underdeveloped) and animal rights (not regulated at the international level nor in domestic legislation, with a few exceptions). Although animal welfare is often regarded as an internal matter to be regulated by individual States, the migratory nature of whales clearly calls for an international approach. The rarity and diversity of whaling today is hindering progressive development of the law. In areas of international law where there are very few active players, their actions become more impactful in carving out the path for customary international law. The NAMMCO nations may therefore be shaping customary international law in this field. Although the diversity of whaling techniques may mean that no practice is sufficiently consistent and uniform to form the basis for customary international law, procedural obligations relating to e.g. surveillance, reporting, and training for shooters, might acquire that status.

A summary of Ryeng’s and Árnadóttir’s presentations is provided in Appendix 5: Theme Session – Summary of the Invited Speaker’s Presentations.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Chair thanked Ryeng and Árnadóttir for their interesting presentations and opened the discussion by asking their views on two aspects.

The Chair noted that different killing techniques offered different challenges and Ryeng was asked what an acceptable instant death rate (IDR) would be. Ryeng answered that in any slaughtering and hunting we should always want the animal to not suffer, so the golden target should be a 100%, however this is not possible even in controlled conditions. Hunting legislations in Norway and other countries do not require a certain IDR or set a limit, likely because it's difficult to achieve and control. However, proper studies of IDR in hunts can help estimating the level of IDR reachable and setting standards from there. The answer to the question is difficult, but an accepted anticipation is that the IDR remains above 80%.

The Chair asked Árnadóttir whether there was a legal vacuum around the topic of animal welfare, in international treaties. The IWC, for instance, only provide standards on whaling techniques (explosive harpoon and electrocution)—so the question is whether there are also legal standards and practices. Árnadóttir considered that voicing demands only on killing techniques represents the absolute minimum standard and is far from a full consideration of animal welfare. Developing standards further should be prioritised in order to live up to the responsibilities in creating (at least soft) laws in animal welfare.

Ryeng was asked how the 95% IDR standard for slaughterhouses had been established, and whether the underlying arguments could not be used to develop standards for whaling and sealing. Ryeng answered that 95% was not achievable in uncontrolled conditions, although 90% may be feasible in some hunts. She agreed that it perhaps could be a good idea to confront this reasoning with respect to hunting realities.

Ryeng mentioned that welfare laws are usually within the remit of national legislation. Norway has very strict legislation in terms of animal welfare. This also covers wild animals (including fish), and concerns equipment, killing methods, and expectations from the hunter. Norway would certainly be happy to help develop standards to avoid animal suffering; ideally an animal should not realise that it is hunted (chasing should be avoided), and then be killed instantaneously.

The IMMC asked which kind of legislation applies to Norwegian sealing, compared to the Canadian three step process, stunning/checking/bleeding. Ryeng explained that, in Norway, a similar three step framework exists for harp and hooded seals, with the primary difference being that shooting at seals in the water is forbidden. The killing is done with rifle from the sealing boat, with a single shot— or two if the hunter is uncertain the animal has died. Checking death is not required, because it is not considered that all hunters are able to identify death with certainty, so it is mandatory to immediately give a blow to the seal with a hakapik. The third step is the bleeding.

For Árnadóttir, environmental affairs have long been within national remits, but as the environmental sphere transcends boundaries, international cooperation is absolutely necessary, both regarding environmental law but also animal laws, especially when dealing with transboundary species. Ryeng commented that this might be difficult regarding whaling and sealing, as countries who are against these practices may likely be unwilling to cooperate.

The IWC mentioned that other domains associated with welfare issues are by-catch and entanglement of marine mammals. Ryeng explained that Norway, since 2017, has been a member of the IWC Whale Entanglement Response Network rescuing entangled whales with training of a special corps.

The Chair asked which role NAMMCO could/should play in the development of welfare laws. Árnadóttir noted that the few active players in whaling and sealing and their diversity hinders the development of laws, but on the other hand these players can be more impactful in carving out the path for standards and, thus, customary international laws.



Páll Nolsøe (Faroe Islands) underlined that NAMMCO has had an important role in the improvement of hunting methods. The killing method in the Faroese drive fishery, for example, has significantly evolved, with the development of the spinal lance within the framework of the Committee for Hunting Methods. The role of NAMMCO is not to make legislation, but to support the establishment of good standards.

Amalie Jessen (Greenland) expressed that it was best that standards be developed at the national level, as the hunting conditions are very different and rules are difficult to generalise, and it would be difficult to reach an international agreement. NAMMCO's role should support the cooperation of NAMMCO countries, so by working together and learning from each other they can improve their standards.

Árnadóttir underlined that the aim should not be to develop international welfare laws, but by supporting synchronised practices, to develop welfare advice that can crystallise as international soft legislation/customary laws.

Þorvarður Þórssón (Iceland) seconded the Faroe Islands and indicated that the role of NAMMCO should not be to propose international legislation, but to generate a cooperation that will induce moving forward together in a positive way in terms of welfare improvement.

Petter Meier (Norway) expressed that making legislation was a national responsibility. However, as the global population is rapidly approaching 10 billion people, the world needs more food sources, and that these commodities would come from the ocean; marine mammals were one of them. The role of NAMMCO could be to provide advice on the best way to use them, both in terms of sustainability and responsible hunting.

The Chair, seconded by the participants, reiterated his thanks to Ryeng and Árnadóttir for their presentations and contributions and thanked the participants for a fruitful discussion in exploring how to increase welfare in marine mammal hunting and exploring what could be the role of NAMMCO and NAMMCO Countries in defining standards and best procedural obligations. There are many nuances on the subject of welfare issues associated with whaling and sealing, and this discussion is far from having exhausted the topic—further opportunities for discussion will no doubt arise.

## **2. NATIONAL & ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS**

Member Countries submitted their National Progress Reports (NPR) for 2023 in accordance with the new deadline of 1 March (NAMMCO/31/NPR/FO-2023, NAMMCO/31/NPR/GL-2023, NAMMCO/31/NPR/IS-2023, NAMMCO/31/NPR/NO-2023). All NPR are available on the [NAMMCO Website](#). NPR had also been received from Japan (Small Cetaceans – 2022 and Large Cetaceans -2023) and an Annual Progress Report from Makivvik (2023).

No specific remarks or clarifications to the reports were brought forward.

The Chair thanked delegations for their input and encouraged Canada to continue providing an NPR to NAMMCO.

## **3. FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES**

### **3.1 REPORT OF THE FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE (FAC)**

The Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee, Páll Nolsøe (Faroe Islands), presented the activities of the Committee since the last Council meeting in March 2023 ([NAMMCO/31/04](#)). The Committee had also met prior to the Council meeting to discuss finances and the progress of the MINTAG project.

The FAC was tasked by the Council to prioritise discussing the structure of the Secretariat, including the expertise and capacity needed to best fulfil the priorities and core work of the Commission. However, this, as well as the procedures behind the hiring of the new staff, was dealt with in Heads of Delegation (HoDs) meetings because it became part of a larger discussion on the future of NAMMCO

and the coming priorities of the Commission. The FAC had therefore mostly dealt with administrative and financial issues.

### **FAC recommendations to Council 31:**

#### ***Financial issues***

- Approve the 2023 audited accounts.
- Take note of the anticipated result for 2024.
- Adopt the 2025 draft budget.
- Approve the 2026 forecast budget.
- Recommend that the necessity for physical meetings contra virtual meetings continue to be carefully weighed by committees and subsidiary bodies, both from a financial and an environmental perspective.
- Following this line, recommend that the number of physically held Scientific Committee working groups continued being limited to four per year.

### **COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Chair thanked Nolsøe for his presentation.

The Council noted the report and **endorsed** the recommendations of the FAC. It urged the FAC to keep an attentive eye on the budget and evolution of the expenses. The FAC should inform the Parties if any issue arises.

### **3.2 AUDITED ACCOUNTS 2023**

Nolsøe presented the audited accounts for 2023 ([NAMMCO/31/05](#) and Appendix 6: Audited Accounts).

The 2023 accounts, which include the results of NAMMCO and the two projects MINTAG and NASS 2024, closed with an overall result of NOK -616,478.

As for NAMMCO specifically, it closed with a deficit of NOK -874,780 as compared to NOK -1,033,814, which was the anticipated 2023 result after the reallocation took place at Council 30. Consequently, the general reserve increased and amounted to NOK 1,253,212 compared to the anticipated amount of NOK 1,094,178.

The negative discrepancies between some of the anticipated results and the accounts are partly explained by:

- an overpaid amount to the pension scheme, due to personnel changes made with the pension scheme provider in November 2023, retroactively to prior dates according to employees' departures and arrivals. The overpaid amount in 2023 will be refunded early in 2024. The salaries to the Officials were also higher than expected, as the United Nations Common System of Salaries is based on the US dollar and is adjusted for inflation from month to month.
- the accounting expenses were higher than anticipated because of the transition in the administration department, which led to more interactions with the accounting firm, this being further complicated by the fact that the accounting firm designated a new accountant to work with NAMMCO in 2023.
- lower expenses were incurred for the recruitment of the new deputy secretaries.

Nolsøe reminded that the FAC had recommended the Council to approve the 2023 audited accounts.

### **COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Council **approved** the 2023 audited accounts.

### 3.3 BUDGET 2024, DRAFT UBDGET 2025, AND FORECAST BUDGET 2026

The presentation to the Council of the 2024 anticipated results, 2025 draft, and 2026 forecast budgets were postponed until the end of the meeting to accommodate decisions made by the Council regarding the workplan of the committees.

#### 3.3.1 Anticipated results 2024

Nolsøe introduced the anticipated results for 2024 ([NAMMCO/31/06](#), Appendix 7: Anticipated Results 2024, Budget 2025, Draft Budget 2026).

The anticipated 2024 result, using the 2023 results as a guide, gives a positive result of 362,349 NOK, compared to the deficit budgeted for by Council 30, -362,682 NOK. Some budget allocations have been reduced and some has been reallocated to 2025 instead, because of the postponement of several working group meetings and activities.

The general reserve is anticipated to be increased to NOK 1,615,560 as of 31.12.2024, instead of the budgeted general reserve of NOK 731,496.

#### COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council took note of the anticipated results for 2024, and the positive increase of the general reserve compared to the 2024 budget adopted by Council 30.

#### 3.3.2 Draft budget 2025 and forecast budget 2026

Nolsøe explained that adjustments had been made to the itemization of expenditures under the different budget lines in relation to decisions made during the Council meeting regarding the workplans. In line with previous years, the income encompasses a 2% increase in membership contributions. Attention was given to keeping the general reserve above the Protected Reserve, which is expected to be kept at 10% of the operating expenses.

Desportes explained the changes made in accordance with what was **agreed** upon under each committee's workplans:

- Scientific Committee:
  - o The workplan and budget proposed by the SC, with the postponements of some working groups, was accepted, although the funding for the three years was slightly reduced to take into account the limitation to only four in-person working group meetings per year.
- Observation Scheme:
  - o Observation activities were postponed from 2025 to 2026, the planned 2025 funding was moved to 2026, to which was added NOK 150,000, to allow observation activities to be carried out in West Greenland with focus on narwhal, beluga, and walrus, as planned in 2023.
  - o NOK 60,000 were added to the observation activities in 2024 and 2025 to allow the CIO to establish contact with hunters' associations and prepare and translate information material.
- Committee for Hunting methods:
  - o The funding attributed to a third training video in 2024 and 2025 was moved to 2026 to give the time to the CHM to evaluate the effect of the first two training videos (see agenda item 7.2 and 7.3). Nok 65.000 and 25.000 were kept on the CHM's budget in 2024 and 2026 respectively, to cover the cost of modifying the 2<sup>nd</sup> video if necessary, and cover translation cost when inviting hunters to participate CHM meetings.

The final draft budget for 2025 recommended by FAC closed with a deficit of NOK -140,361 and a Total Reserve of 1,475,199. The forecast budget 2026 closed with a deficit of NOK -628,392 and a Total Reserve of 846,807.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council **adopted** the 2025 draft budget, as budget 2025 and **approved** the 2026 forecast budget, as draft budget 2026 (Appendix 7: Anticipated Results 2024, Budget 2025, Draft Budget 2026).

The Council **reiterated** that the necessity for holding physical meetings should be considered at all levels of the Commission, both from a financial and an environmental perspective.

### 3.4 ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT 2023

The General Secretary introduced the Administrative Report ([NAMMCO/31/07](#)), which presented an overview of the Commission's (Council, subsidiary bodies, Secretariat) activities in the past year.

The year 2023 was noteworthy for the Secretariat, which bid farewell to Deputy Secretary Charlotte Winsnes, after 23 years at the Secretariat, and Scientific Secretary Albert Chacón, and welcomed an Administrative Officer, Ian Bolduc, who started in June, and two Deputy Secretaries, Maria Garagouni (with focus on science) and Naima El bani Altuna (with focus on dissemination), both of whom started in September.

Organising and preparing overview documents to facilitate the changes in staff, the recruitment, and the introduction of the new Staff represented a central occupation in 2023. Updating the website with new information, and in particular the species pages, as well as the NAMMCO's databases also remained a strong focus. The secretariat also worked on the implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Communication Plan, [CP3](#) 2023–2024, adopted by Council 29 in September 2022, including developing the concept of and applying for funding for an educational portal on marine mammals and the marine environment that will be made freely available on the NAMMCO website (more details on the project see can be found under Item 12.4 and document NAMMCO/31/16).

The Secretariat also strongly contributed to supporting the NASS 2024 and the MINTAG projects (for more information, see Items 5 and 6 respectively) and developing the second training video for minke whale hunters (see Item 7.2) released at this meeting.

The internship programme, which started in 2017, continued with two interns (Jana Djukarić from Germany and Marina Metić from Croatia) joining the Secretariat in 2023. The programme continues providing the Secretariat with additional human resources and expertise and is a highly appreciated input to the otherwise small Secretariat, in terms of energy, ideas, and creativity. It is considered a positive experience for both the interns and the Secretariat. It also functions as an eye opener for the interns on today's reality of whaling and sealing, especially within the perspective of relative environmental cost, food security, blue economy, and contribution to fulfilling the UN SDGs. They bring this knowledge with them when dispersing towards their next career steps to national or international institutions.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Chair thanked Desportes for her presentation and noted that information on External Relations and Communication and Outreach would be reported under Items 11 and 12, respectively. He **commended** the report and the usefulness of getting this overview of the Commission activities.

The Council took note of the report.

### 3.5 PROPOSAL FOR A VOCABULARY AMENDMENT TO RULES OF PROCEDURE (ROPS) OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES

Gender-neutral terms have been used in recent years by the Secretariat in official documents and reports, as in any types of documentation. However, older documents like the RoPs of the Council and the Committees (except the newest ones) do not use gender-neutral terms. As an example, the terms Chairman and Vice-Chairman are used instead of Chair and Vice-Chair.

The Secretariat therefore proposes to replace the non-gender-neutral terms to gender-neutral terms in the RoPs. The amendment would be strictly limited to changing the words and no other

modifications would be made to the RoPs. As an example, the RoPs for the Committee on Hunting Methods were provided, with the changes proposed and, as it is usually done, with the indication in the sub-title of the character of the changes performed and the date when the changes were adopted.

In accordance with the RoPs of the NAMMCO bodies, this proposal for Amendments to the ROPs reached the Chair of the Council 60 days prior to the Council meeting (on 15 January 2024) and the Parties 30 days prior to the Council meeting (the HoDs were provided with the proposal on 7 February, as a document for their next meeting on 13–14 February).

### COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council **adopted** the proposed vocabulary amendment to the RoPs of the Council and the committees where relevant.

### 3.6 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

## 4. SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

### 4.1 REPORT OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE (SC)

The Chair of the SC, Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid, presented the activities of the SC since the last meeting of the Council in March 2023. Rosing-Asvid focused on the general part of the SC activities and report ([NAMMCO/31/08](#)), as information and recommendations pertaining to species and eco-system related issues had been presented to the relevant Management Committees ([NAMMCO/31/FI01-03](#)).

On a general note, the SC reiterated its concerns regarding the narwhal & beluga situation in East Greenland, noting the inability of the MCC to endorse a recommendation for zero narwhal removals in East Greenland, when this recommendation follows the precautionary approach that Council 30 (2023) adopted.

The SC further noted the establishment under the Management Committees of the Working Group on enhancing user involvement in NAMMCO decision making (UIWG) and the adopted terms of reference. The SC welcomed any knowledge that can improve the assessments of stocks. Relating to narwhals in East Greenland, the SC noted that user knowledge is already largely included in the assessment. Most of the work in the field involves hunters, some of the information in their catch reports are used as data in the assessments, and the latest aerial survey involved hunters from beginning to end.

#### 4.1.1 Overall work between the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> meetings of the Scientific Committee

The 30<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SC was held on 22–26 January 2024, with observers from Canada (online) and Japan at the Marine & Freshwater Research Institute, Hafnarfjörður, Iceland. The SC reviewed the activities that had taken place since its last meeting (January 2023), including the work of the working groups (WG) and workshops (WS) and their conclusions, the progress of the MINTAG Steering Group, and the status of preparations for the NASS 2024 cetacean survey.

The SC completed the review of the bowhead whale and grey seal website species pages initiated at SC 29 and initiated at SC 30 the review of four species pages (bearded and ringed seals, white beaked and white sided dolphins).

The SC also reviewed the progress by the sub-group looking into how to provide advice to Japan on the best way to analyse long-term datasets for understanding ecosystem functions relevant to large baleen whale behaviour (distribution, movement, and feeding ecology), and make possible a comparison with data-rich North Atlantic ecosystems (e.g., Barents Sea and Irminger Sea).

The SC endorsed the draft Terms of Reference for the new technical WG on Genetics.

The SC recommended that a joint travel fund be established for facilitating exchange and cooperation between NAMMCO and Japanese scientists and rendering easier face-to-face meetings, as well as participation in fieldwork and projects.

Council 30 requested the SC to propose a system for categorising NAMMCO stocks, which would reflect the abundance, status of knowledge, and levels of removals of each. The SC requested clarification from the Council as to the need for such a system, given NAMMCO's existing approach to conducting species assessments.

Following a request from Council 30 (Request R-1.6.5) and based on the SC recommended assessment frequency for each species, the SC proposed a long-term plan for the assessment of NAMMCO stocks currently undergoing significant removals, which can be adjusted as needed; this plan is presented in Table 1.

### Working Groups, Planning Groups and Project Meetings

In 2023, the SC convened a Panarctic Bearded Seal WS (March), a WG on Coastal Seals (May), a joint ICES/NAMMCO/NAFO WG on Harp and Hooded seals (August), a WG on By-Catch (October), a WG on Dolphins (October), a technical WG on Genetics (October), a WG on Ringed Seals (November), and an *Ad hoc* Working Group on Narwhal in East Greenland (December). It also participated in a joint ICES/NAMMCO/NAFO Benchmark WS (May).

The NASS 2024 Scientific planning Committee held four meetings (two online meetings, one physical, and one hybrid during the SC meeting), more information on which can be found under Item 5. The Steering Group of the MINTAG project held four meetings (two online and two in person, one ahead of the SC meeting) and conducted several field tests; more information can be found under Item 6.

Table 1. Long-term assessment plan for harvested species proposed by SC/30, with for each species the assessment frequency and next three assessment years. Species subjected to removals but not included in the schedule will be assessed by the SC or outside its remit (such as bowhead and humpback whales, assessed by the IWC).

Species	Frequency (years)	Assessment year		
Walrus	5	2026	2031	2036
Ringed Seal	5	2029	2034	2039
Bearded Seal	5	2027	2032	2042
Beluga and Narwhal (West Greenland)	5	2025	2030	2035
Narwhal (East Greenland)	3	2026	2029	2032
Pilot Whale	5	2025	2030	2035
Dolphin	5	2028	2033	2038
Harbour Porpoise	7	2026	2033	2040
Large Whales (Fin and Minke)	7	2025	2032	2039
Harp and Hooded Seals	2	2025	2027	2029
Coastal Seals	6	2026	2032	2038
Killer Whale	9	2028	2037	2046

#### 4.1.2 Proposed workplan for 2024–2026

Rosing-Asvid presented the workplan for 2024 and the suggested workplan for 2025–2026, (see table below). The SC intends to continue the planning of the NASS 2024 until summer 2024, conduct a debriefing meeting in fall, and review the analyses and results in 2025 and 2026. It further aims to

engage in the testing, deployment work, and analysis related to the MINTAG project throughout 2024–2026.

2024	2025	2026
<p><b><u>WG and WS meetings:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- WG on By-Catch (physical)</li> <li>- Genetics WG (hybrid)</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>WG and WS meetings:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abundance Estimate WG (online)</li> <li>- WG on By-catch (online)</li> <li>- WG on Harp and Hooded Seals</li> <li>- JWG NAMMCO-JCNB</li> <li>- Pilot Whale WG (physical)</li> <li>- [Large Whale Assessment WG] might be in 2026 as needs 2024 abundance data</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>WG and WS meetings:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harbour porpoise WG (physical)</li> <li>- Coastal Seals WG (physical)</li> <li>- Walrus WG</li> <li>- WG on By-catch (online)</li> <li>- Narwhal in East Greenland WG (pending MCC decision) - online</li> <li>- Abundance Estimate WG (physical)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Other:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NASS 2024 SpC: physical and online meetings</li> <li>- NASS 2024 surveys</li> <li>- NASS 2024 SpC: online debriefing meeting</li> <li>- MINTAG StG: physical &amp; online meetings</li> <li>- MINTAG: deployment field work and analysis</li> <li>- MINTAG StG: debriefing meeting</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Other:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MINTAG StG: online &amp; physical meetings</li> <li>- MINTAG: deployment field work and analysis</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Other:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MINTAG StG: online &amp; physical meetings</li> <li>- MINTAG: deployment field work and analysis</li> </ul>

Compared to the proposal forwarded by Council 30, the SC recommended the postponement of the walrus WG from 2024 to 2026 (so the abundance issued from the new surveys could be included in the assessment), and the harbour porpoise WG to 2026 (with assessments made for all areas). The JWG NAMMMCO-JCNB was delayed to 2025 at the request of the Canadian scientists. The SC also recommended that the pilot whale WG be held in 2025 as planned, so the 2024 abundance estimates could be included, but not postponed to later, as several WGs are already planned for 2026.

The SC annual meeting will be hosted by Norway on 20–24 January 2025. The location is to be decided.

#### COMMENTS RELATED ON ITEM 4.1.2

Greenland was waiting for a new advice on walrus, as the existing advice given in 2018 ended in 2023. Therefore, although the SC concluded that the advice from the 2018 assessment would remain valid until a new assessment was carried out in 2026, Greenland stated its concern over the postponement of the walrus WG meeting from 2024 to 2026.

#### 4.1.3 Other business

There was no other business.

#### COMMENTS & DISCUSSION RELATED ON ITEM 4.1

The Chair thanked the SC Chair for his presentation and thanked the SC Chair, Vice-Chair, and Committee for their work.

The Council took note of the report. A special note was taken of the reiterated strong concerns of the SC regarding the narwhal and beluga situation in East Greenland. The Chair noted that the MCC had agreed on a proposal for conservation and management to be forwarded to Greenland regarding narwhal and beluga in East Greenland; further information can be found in the [MCC report](#) and under Item 9.1.

The Council did not support the establishment of a joint NAMMCO-Japan travel fund and noted that cooperation and funding should be project specific, as stipulated in the LOI signed by Japan and NAMMCO in 2023.

The Council 30 still requested that a traffic light system for categorising NAMMCO stocks be defined, which would reflect each stock’s abundance, status of knowledge, and levels of removals. It will be helpful both in terms of awareness to managers and the public, and dissemination. It is a simple awareness/information tool that was looked for, and not a system such as the IUCN red list, based on an extinction risk assessment.

## 4.2 ADOPTION OF PRIORITIES AND WORKPLAN 2024–2026

The SC was reminded that it should keep in mind the Council’s **recommendation** of no more than four in-person WG/WS meetings per year, although noting that for 2025, some of the WG meetings were postponed from 2024.

The Council **endorsed** the following workplan (Table 2), based on the SC proposed workplan for 2024, 2025, and 2026. It noted that the Large Whale Assessment WG may need to be postponed to 2026, depending on the rapidity in getting validated abundance data for large whales following NASS 2024. However, it was also highlighted that the years 2025 and 2026 are both fully loaded, and the meetings planned for 2025 should be held that year and not postponed to 2026.

Table 2: SC workplan adopted by the Council for the period 2024-2026. Activities in italics were already held.

2024	2025	2026
<p><b>WG and WS meetings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- WG on By-Catch (physical)</li> <li>- Genetics WG (hybrid)</li> </ul>	<p><b>WG and WS meetings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abundance Estimate WG (online &amp; physical)</li> <li>- WG on By-catch (online)</li> <li>- WG on Harp and Hooded Seals (physical)</li> <li>- JWG NAMMCO-JCNB (physical)</li> <li>- Pilot Whale WG (physical)</li> <li>- [Large Whale Assessment WG] might be in 2026 as needs 2024 abundance data</li> </ul>	<p><b>WG and WS meetings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harbour porpoise WG (physical)</li> <li>- Coastal Seals WG (physical)</li> <li>- Walrus WG</li> <li>- WG on By-catch (online)</li> <li>- Abundance Estimate WG (physical)</li> <li>- [Large Whale Assessment WG]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NASS 2024 SpC: <i>physical</i> and online meetings</li> <li>- NASS 2024 surveys</li> <li>- NASS 2024 SpC: online debriefing meeting</li> <li>- MINTAG StG: <i>physical</i> &amp; online meetings</li> <li>- MINTAG: deployment field work and analysis</li> <li>- MINTAG StG: debriefing meeting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MINTAG StG: online &amp; physical meetings</li> <li>- MINTAG: deployment field work and analysis</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MINTAG StG: online &amp; physical meetings</li> <li>- MINTAG: deployment field work and analysis</li> </ul>

The Council **reiterated its recommendation** to the Parties that the necessary collection of information and analyses should be prioritised and completed on time, e.g., regarding abundance estimates, catch data, life parameters, and stock structure. Reference was specifically made to the pilot whale data (Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland) and the analysis of NASS 2024 survey data (all Parties).

## 4.3 OTHER BUSINESS

Japan expressed its appreciation of being invited as observer to the meetings of the Scientific Committee, and its continued interest in exchanging scientific information and information on the conservation, management, and study of marine mammals. Japan will continue to provide data and information; it looks forward to the progress in the common project on the comparative analysis of ecosystem drivers commanding whale distribution in the Western North Pacific ecosystem and the



Barents and Irminger seas ecosystems. Discussions of further cooperation were on the agenda of the bilateral NAMMCO-Japan meeting following the conclusion of the Council meeting.

## 5. UPDATE ON THE PLANNING OF NASS 2024

The upcoming North Atlantic Sighting Survey (NASS) in summer 2024 is the latest in a series of synoptic sighting surveys by NAMMCO Countries, which have taken place from 1987 to 2015. Guðjón M. Sigurðsson (IS) presented the NASS series and an update on the planning of NASS 2024.

The NASS surveys are designed to generate robust unbiased abundance estimates for each country's target species in all areas of importance for management: i) pilot whales (FO) around the Faroe Islands and in the North Atlantic, ii) minke whales (GL, IS, NO) in West and East Greenland, around Iceland, Jan Mayen, Svalbard, and the central Norwegian sea, iii) fin whales (GL, IS) in the Central North Atlantic (around Iceland, off East Greenland, Faroe Islands, and Jan Mayen) and in West Greenland, iv) humpback whales (GL) in West Greenland.

However, as every cetacean sighting is recorded, they also provide abundance for other species as well. NASS 2024 will add to the NASS series, thus forming a 37-year time series, providing a realistic opportunity for detecting changes in abundance and distribution of several cetacean species.

### 5.1 PLANNING OF THE SURVEYS

The Scientific Planning Committee (SpC) is composed of SC members: Rikke G. Hansen (GL, Chair), Bjarni Mikkelsen (FO), Guðjón M. Sigurðsson (IS), Nils Øien and Martin Biuw (NO), as well as the Secretariat. Two external experts have been added to the SpC to assist with and advise on survey design and analysis. The SpC has held a series of ten online and in-person meetings between September 2020 and March 2024 to coordinate survey plans and methodologies.

As most previous surveys, the NASS 2024 survey is composed of two parts, the so-called *national surveys* covering essential areas for the countries' target species (West Greenland, Faroese and Icelandic area, part of the Norwegian mosaic survey cycle), and the so-called *associated survey efforts*. The associated survey efforts are essential for providing a larger and coherent survey coverage of the whole North Atlantic, enabling the detection of major shifts in the abundance and distribution of cetaceans, such as the abundance declines observed in the Icelandic coastal waters in 2007 and off West Greenland in 2015. The combination of *national surveys* and *associated survey efforts*, therefore, provides more reliable trends in abundance for the area. Besides the four NAMMCO Countries, Canada and the UK (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) are also planning to conduct sighting surveys in the summer of 2024, extending the survey coverage across the North Atlantic, similarly to the T-NASS (trans North Atlantic Sightings Survey) in 2007.

To be coherent and synoptic, the surveys are planned and coordinated at the NAMMCO level. Also, experience from previous NASS surveys showed that the cost of generating abundance estimates for non-target species should be included in the common budget to secure the completion of those analyses in a timely manner.

The planned survey area for the 2024 survey extends to approximately 5,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> and can be seen in Figure 1 below.

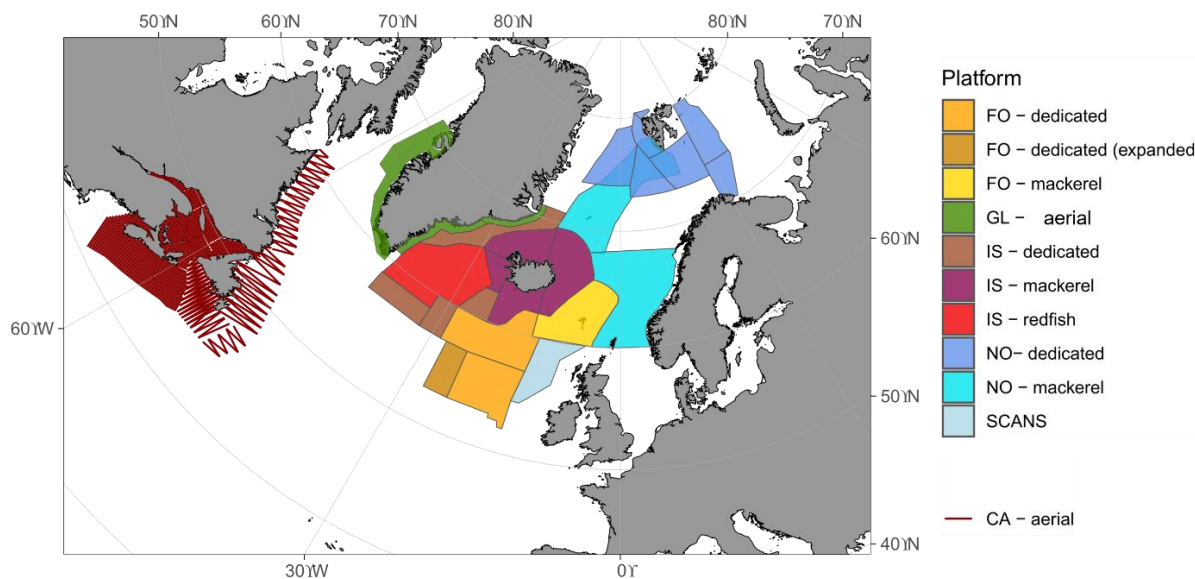


Figure 1. Planned NASS 2024 effort, including national and associated surveys, as well as planned Canadian (CA) and UK (SCANS) surveys. FO: Faroe Islands; GL: Greenland; IS: Iceland; NO: Norway.

The cost of the four national surveys and data analysis is evaluated to close to 30 million NOK and covered by the four countries. NAMMCO supports the cost of the coordination and preparation of the survey, as well as the review of the abundance estimates (589,000 NOK plus the in-kind support of the Secretariat). The *Arktis* 2030 call of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), through an application by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, granted 9,780,000 NOK to cover the cost of the associated survey efforts, as well as part of the data analysis of non-target species. Norway's supplementary contribution to NASS 2024 is integral to its success, contributing to increasing the total survey effort (by allowing using both dedicated and opportunistic platforms) and rendering contiguous the different 'national' areas surveyed, providing a larger and more cohesive survey coverage of the whole Northeast Atlantic, which is essential to the reliability and robustness of the results.

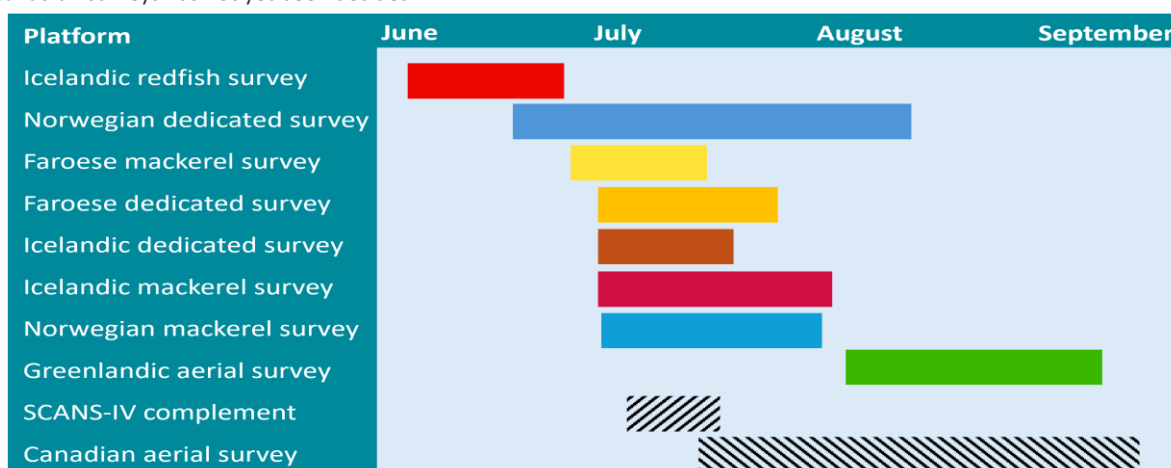
The planning, preparation, and execution of the West Greenland aerial survey and the Norwegian mosaic ship survey are ensured by Greenland and Norway, respectively, and will be similar to those of previous NASS surveys. The NASS Scientific Planning Committee coordinates the planning, preparation, and execution of the ship surveys in the Icelandic and Faroese areas, as well as the associated surveys.

All surveys, aerial and ship-based, will operate under double-platform configuration, which allows for the correction of cetacean perception bias that occurs when animals are available to be seen but are missed by the observers. All but the Norwegian surveys will use an Independent Observer mode, while the Norwegian vessels will employ a Tracking mode. The scheduled sailing time for each NASS 2024 survey platform is provided in Table 3.

For datasets that will be analysed together, the survey protocols (observer setup and equipment, data entry methods) will be the same across platforms. For example, the dedicated Faroese and Icelandic survey effort will be analysed together. Similarly, the Norwegian mackerel survey will be tested against the dedicated survey effort around Svalbard and will therefore use the same protocols.

The hardware and software for recording sighting data, as well as plans for observer training and sighting protocols for the Icelandic and Faroese observers, that the Faroe Islands is responsible for, is not finalised yet; however, they will be ready for review by the SpC at a meeting in May, prior to the start of the survey.

Table 3. Scheduled sailing time for each NASS 2024 survey platform. Note: the timing of the SCANS-IV complement and Canadian surveys has not yet been decided.



## 5.2 PLANNING OF THE DATA ANALYSIS AND REVIEW

The schedule for all NASS activities planned for 2024 and 2025 is shown in Table 4. Following the completion of all surveys, a debriefing meeting will be held in October 2024, to review the survey process as a whole. Data validation will begin as early as September 2024, as most of the surveys will have been completed before then, and analysis will begin shortly thereafter, both for target and non-target species.

The technical Working Group on Abundance Estimates (AEWG) will review the initial analyses in January 2025, providing guidance and corrections as needed to obtain robust estimates for each species and stocks; it will review the final estimates later for endorsement. AEWG- and SC-endorsed results will be used by stock/species assessment working groups. A second meeting of the AEWG will be held in the Fall of 2025 (ahead of the Pilot Whale WG meeting). If needed, AEWG-endorsed results will be presented to the Scientific Committee for its endorsement as they are generated. Final endorsed estimates will be presented to the NAMMCO Management Committees and Council in 2026.

Table 4. Timeline of NASS activities during 2024 and 2025.

Activities	2024										2025 (to 2026)		
	Jan	Mar	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Fall	Winter
SpC meetings													
Surveys													
Debrief meeting													
Data validation													
Data analysis													
Abundance Estimate WG meetings													
Results to managers													

## COMMENTS & DISCUSSION ON ITEM 5

The Chair thanked Sigurdsson for his presentation and the SpC for its work. The Council took note of the progress in the planning, but also that important preparatory work remained to be done for some of the surveys, in terms of protocols, and hardware and software for data recording.

Norway noted that the NMFA, as well as the countries, are contributing a lot of money into these surveys, and would like to stress the importance that the surveys and the overall NASS 2024 project be a success. This demands that the protocols, hardware, and software are developed on time. Norway requests that the SpC provide regular updates on this progress to the HoDs.

Sigurdsson specified that most of the protocols won't be deviating too much from previous surveys. Mikkelsen (Faroe Islands) noted that the protocols and software from 2015 will be used as starting points; choice of software and hardware and the development of protocols will be finalised by May 1<sup>st</sup>, to be presented and reviewed by the SpC at its May meeting, in advance of the survey itself.

Desportes noted that there have been lots of changeovers in recent years in the survey staff, especially in the Faroes and Iceland, with new cruise leaders, and it is important that the deadline of May 1st is respected, so there is ample time for training and getting well acquainted with the data collection protocols.

The Chair questioned whether the timing of the data analysis was ambitious enough, considering the planned timing for species assessments. Sigurdsson answered that it was more ambitious than for previous surveys and that it remained imperative that the pilot whale and large whale data are analysed prior to the species WGs in 2025. Desportes also reminded that the final reporting to NMFA was due in early 2027, and that it was important that the outputs/deliveries mentioned in the application to NMFA were fulfilled.

## 6. MINTAG PROJECT

The MINTAG (Miniature Tag) Project, launched on 4 August 2021, is a scientific cooperation between NAMMCO and the Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ). It aims at developing smaller and lighter satellite transmitters with optimal ballistic performance for long-distance deployments on lesser-known fast-swimming rorqual species (blue, fin, sei, Bryde's, and minke whales) and pilot whales. MINTAG intends to respond to outstanding questions on habitat use, dispersal and movements, behaviour, and stock delimitation. The high-profile project aims at providing missing but essential tools for the management of these lesser-known species in the North Atlantic and North Pacific Oceans.

The Steering Group (StG) is composed of SC members and scientists from the Institute of Cetacean Research of Japan, as well as the Fisheries Agency of Japan and the NAMMCO Secretariat. Mads Peter Heide-Jørgensen from the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources is the project leader; the project is administrated by the NAMMCO Secretariat. The StG chose, in February 2022, to cooperate with the US satellite tag manufacturing company Wildlife Computers (WC).

### 6.1 REPORT OF THE MINTAG STEERING GROUP3

Martin Biuw (Norway) introduced the project's progress report for March 2023–March 2024 (corresponding to Japan's financial year) and the activity plan up to March 2025 ([NAMMCO/31/15](#)).

Performance/ballistics tests of the prototype MINTAGs were carried out by StG members and WC in several locations, including the Faroe Islands, Japan, Denmark, and Iceland throughout 2023. Different tag and launcher features were tested. A second set of testing was conducted at the Icelandic Whaling Station in September to investigate the deployment performance of dummy tags on fin whale carcasses.

The first deployment of the first 25 MINTAG prototypes, version V0b, on live fin and minke whales took place from June to September off Japan, Greenland, and Norway. The remaining tags were deployed in October by external collaborators off northern Norway. Although the project was developing well, the summer 2023 experimental deployments revealed logistic and functional difficulties. The results obtained from the deployed tags were very poor, both in terms of tag retention and transmission.

### **Changes in project schedule**

In light of the difficulties encountered in the summer 2023 deployment, the StG agreed that the time was not yet right for a large-scale tag deployment and decided to conduct in 2024 further tests of the tag housing design and electronics. Further, the StG agreed to limit the to a smaller number of two different designs of the minke whale tag.

This decision results in a delay of a year in the buying and deployment of final tags, if any (2025 and 2026, instead of 2024 and 2025), as well as analysis of results and their publication.

### **Increased cost of the tag development**

The need for further improvements of the tag housing (which is presently done by WC) requires more work than anticipated from the tag developer, thus generating an extra cost for the project, which was not included in the original budget, and that the partners will have to address, likely by using funds originally allocated to buying the final tag version.

The scientists involved remain optimistic about the outcome of the project. For the success of the project, it remains essential that the funding from the partners originally agreed upon, both in kind and direct, continues to be delivered.

### **Project dissemination**

The project website ([www.mintag-project.com](http://www.mintag-project.com)), developed by the Secretariat during the summer 2022 in collaboration with the StG, offers information on the project, background and aim, target species, project partners and participating institutes, timeline, and activities. During summer 2023, it was updated with the deployment activities of the different tagging teams and the movements of the tagged whales, when this was available. The pages most visited are the presentation of the MINTAG project, closely followed by /follow the whales/ pages, that precisely report on the tag deployment activities and provide maps of the whale movements.

## **6.2 FINANCIAL UPDATE**

The overall cost of the project was estimated to be close to NOK 26,500,000, including direct costs (tag development and production, NOK 10,315,000) and in-kind costs (scientists' work and field work costs, such as ship time, food, travel, etc).

Some changes to the original budget were made when the agreement with WC was signed, based on the real cost agreed with the manufacturer (in US dollars). Some expenses that had not been accounted for were also added. A further increase in cost originates in the change in exchange rate between US dollars and NOK, which is not favourable to the project, and may significantly increase the cost of the US produced development and tags.

Despite the delay in the project and therefore in incurring expenses (both due to the delayed start and the necessity of the second prototype's deployment in 2024), the five partners continue to agree that the transfer of the allocated funding would follow the initial schedule. The protracted use of the funds would hopefully cover costs until the end of the project, now delayed by one year, with the Project End Workshop now planned for the end of 2027 instead of 2026.

What remains essential for the project is that the funding from the five partners originally agreed upon, both in kind and direct, continues to be delivered.

### **COMMENTS & DISCUSSION ON ITEM 6**

The Council took note of the report.

The Chair acknowledged the unfortunate logistics issues encountered by the NAMMCO partners in summer 2023 that impaired the proper deployments of prototype tags and their satisfactory testing. He noted the strong commitment of Iceland, Japan, and Norway to deploy prototype tags in summer 2024.

Norway, supported by the NAMMCO Countries, expressed its appreciation to the commitment of Japan to the project, both financially and scientifically. Norway noted that if the project was a success, it would bring information that would allow a more robust management of the target species. The challenges were understandable, but the success of the project was important for sound management. It is therefore important that the logistic failure in the 2023 prototype deployments not be repeated this year.

Biuw noted that the development of a new technology rarely runs smoothly and according to schedule. The project is challenging, and it is important that time be dedicated to deploying prototype tags in areas of high whale densities. He also noted that the dialog with the tag supplier was good.

Japan expressed its appreciation for being involved in the MINTAG project and confirmed its continued contribution, both scientific and financial.

The Chair emphasized that the success of the project relies upon two main factors, the technological advances, and the continued financial contribution of the partners, noting the generous contribution of Japan and Norway. It is importance that the agreed financing from the five partner countries and NAMMCO be continued, both with regards to direct costs and providing the in-kind funding allowing the deployment of the tags on the whales.

## 7. COMMITTEE ON HUNTING METHODS

### 7.1 REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HUNTING METHODS (CHM)

The Chair of the Committee on Hunting Methods, Jóhann Ásmundsson (Iceland, replacing Elin B. Ragnarsdóttir, who was elected in March 2023 but subsequently changed work position) presented the activities of CHM since Council 30 ([NAMMCO/31/09](#)). Regular information exchange, updates, and reviews.

The CHM held only two meetings, in February and March 2024. It reviewed the document describing the CHM background and status as of August 2023, which was prepared by Winsnes and Desportes. The CHM agreed that the document was comprehensive and informative and presented a good overview of the Committee's work. As such, it should be made available on the NAMMCO website, with the inclusion of a reference to a time to death study conducted in Iceland on fin whales in 2014.

The CHM reviewed and updated the background documents related to its work that are available on the NAMMCO website, such as [Laws and regulations](#), [References](#) related to marine mammal hunting, overview of [Conservation status of stocks in NAMMCO countries](#) and of [Hunting methods in NAMMCO](#).

The CHM was presented with the 2<sup>nd</sup> training video and provided recommendations (see under Item 7.2 for more details). In its upcoming meetings, the CHM plans to discuss the impact of the current videos, whether they are used by hunters and contribute to improving safety and killing methods. If the outcome seems positive, the Committee will explore potential topics for new videos, including subjects like seal hunting, dolphin drives, how to minimise struck and lost rates, and how to best implement the recommendations provided by the CHM Expert Groups.

The CHM also agreed to invite a hunter representative to CHM meetings to provide insights and updates on specific hunting methods, as well as address crucial issues related to the activity, including their perspectives on challenges and opportunities.

The CHM discussed opportunities of cooperating with Japan on welfare issues and recognised the potential benefits of exchanging information between NAMMCO member Countries and Japan on all marine mammal hunting types and procedures, including types of weapons, equipment and method used, as well as time to death, related hunter training, and hunt monitoring. The Committee noted that it would appreciate receiving an update from Japan on the status of recommendations provided by the Expert Groups in 2010 and 2015. The Committee was willing to follow up on a possible collaboration with Japan and schedule a meeting to further discuss this topic in detail, should Council 31 decide to follow up on this cooperation.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Chair thanked the Chair of the CHM for his report and the Committee for its work. The Council noted the report.

The Chair considered it a good idea to invite hunters to meetings, so they could also provide their input, but he also underlined that persons with practical experience of the hunt should be members of the Committee.

Japan noted that they participated in the two NAMMCO Expert Group Meetings on Assessing Time to Death from Large Whale Hunts in 2010 and 2015, where Japanese hunting methods were reported and evaluated. Japan resumed commercial whaling after leaving the IWC on 1 June 2019. Since then, there has been no scientific observation of hunting methods, but Japan do not believe there have been any major changes.

Desportes noted that the CHM is responsible for examining the performance of killing methods and associated welfare issues in all hunts, not only large whale hunts.

Makivvik noted that the present developments in Norway were making difficult to access penthrite grenades, that was needed for the bowhead whale hunt. Makivvik would appreciate if access could be made easier, as this killing method was considered to be the most efficient. Makivvik also noted that, traditionally, before being killed, belugas and narwhals are harpooned with a harpoon carrying a buoy to ensure that animals are not lost.

## 7.2 PRESENTATION OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> TRAINING VIDEO

Council 28 (2021) expressed its support for developing short instruction videos for hunters. The 1<sup>st</sup> video focused on the safe handling of the 50 mm Kongsberg whaling cannon with loaded pusher shell (cartridge), the harpoon and the Whale grenade 99. The video 'Whale hunting using deck-mounted harpoon and penthrite grenade' was produced in Norwegian and translated to English and Greenlandic and [released](#) in 2022.

Council 29 had approved the production of a 2<sup>nd</sup> instruction video focusing on the importance of target location and shooting angle in large whale grenade hunts. This animation film was expected to be finalised before the summer 2023, although it was only completed in February 2024. The Chair of the CHM (Kathrine Ryeng at the time) and Winsnes from the Secretariat led the project.

Ryeng presented the 2<sup>nd</sup> instruction video. She mentioned that the CHM was presented with the video at its meeting in March 2024. The CHM complimented the work and recommended that a) the video be translated into Greenlandic (as initially planned) and Norwegian (new proposal); b) optional English and Icelandic subtitles be included in the English version to increase the reach of the videos; c) the language used in the video be simplified in the translated versions, as the video currently has a scientific tone in its English version. This aimed at making the content of the video more accessible to the target audience. Some of these changes had already been incorporated in the video presented to the Council.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Greenland complimented the video and supported the work of the CHM in developing training videos supporting hunters' safety and animal welfare.

CAFF saw the video as being very useful. It noted, however, that it was mentioned that "whaling is a form of a big game hunting", which could create an incorrect perception, as 'big game hunting' is usually associated with sport hunting, while whale hunting represents an important food resource in the North. CAFF, supported by Iceland, suggested the removal of this sentence and addition of an introductory sentence specifying this clearly. Iceland further noted that both videos complemented each other well.

Iceland also noted that there are regulations in Iceland concerning the shooting distance and wondered whether this should be mentioned in the video.

Faroe Islands noted that the Faroese pilot whale association had decided at its last meeting to create a video about the grind (pilot whale drive), from the beginning of the drive to the butchering, and including recipes, to teach the younger generations how to do it right.

Makavvik expressed appreciation over this kind of videos. Since the reintroduction of the bowhead whale hunt, they have focused a lot on safety and dialogue with hunters, as well as training for the entire process (from hunting to butchering). They further added that they wanted to learn from the experience of northern Barrow, also regarding the best way of butchering. Ryeng noted that she saw this cooperation as very positive, as it was encouraging that Makivvik had the desire to hunt bowhead whales with the most efficient hunting tools.

Greenland noted that hunters had been involved in making the NAMMCO hunting manuals and considered that it was important to continue involving hunters in this kind of work, to better motivate and engage them in understanding best practice.

The Chair asked whether Japan and the US saw the video as a useful tool for communicating with and training the hunters on welfare issues and whether they could be interesting in Japan or in the US. Japan specified that their hunting methods differ slightly, with the whales being chased, and that the video would need to be modified; overall, however, they saw them as an effective way of communicating with and training hunters. The US saw the video as a useful tool but mentioned that there is already a lot of oral communication and between managers and hunters.

The Council commended the video and **recommended** the implementation of the proposed changes to and translation of the video. Norway and Greenland agreed to pay for the translation, while Iceland will look into whether a translation to Icelandic is necessary.

### 7.3 ADOPTION OF PRIORITIES AND WORKPLAN 2024–2026

In 2023, the CHM had reiterated the usefulness of organising an expert group (EG) meeting or workshop on the rifle hunt in Greenland (originally endorsed by Council 27), although it agreed to postpone the gathering until Greenland had sufficient resources to prioritise the necessary work for such an undertaking to be successful. This EG was again postponed, as Greenland reiterated that the necessary data is still unavailable, and that such data would need to be analysed for the workshop/EG meeting to be effective. Greenland had also informed that it was in the process of drafting a new Executive Order, set to be enacted by Spring 2024, through which reporting on struck and lost rates and catches will be made compulsory.

The workplan proposed by the CHM is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. CHM workplan proposed by the CHM and adopted by Council for the period 2024-2026.

2024	2025	2026
Update information on regulations and laws	Update information on regulations and laws	Update information on regulations and laws
Review the catch & hunting database (data 2023)	Review the catch & hunting database (data 2024)	Review the catch & hunting database (data 2025)
Invite hunters to CHM meetings	Invite hunters to CHM meetings	Invite hunters to CHM meetings
Exchange information with Japan on hunts (type, training, monitoring)	Exchange information with Japan on hunts (type, training, monitoring)	
Evaluate reception of current videos if possible (i.e., is it informative for hunters?)	Evaluate reception of current videos if possible (i.e., is it informative for hunters?)	
	If videos considered useful: Discuss themes for a new video	Supervise the making of a new video



## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council **endorsed** the proposed workplan (Table 5), noting that it was good to evaluate the success of the two first videos, before embarking on new ones. The Chair noted that keeping track of and reporting on the practices in marine mammal hunting may influence policies.

Greenland reiterated that it strongly supports the work of the CHM in improving and developing the effectiveness of the hunting and the safety of the whalers.

### 7.4 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

## 8. COMMITTEE ON INSPECTION AND OBSERVATION

### 8.1 REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INSPECTION AND OBSERVATION (CIO)

The chair of the Committee on Inspection and Observation, Ulla Wang (Faroe Islands), presented the activities of the CIO since Council 30 ([NAMMCO/31/10](#)).

The Committee worked by correspondence in 2023. It reviewed the reports of the two observers who conducted Observation Activities (OA) in West Greenland in the period February–April 2023. It held the Observers' corps Annual Meeting on 4 May, where information on coming activities was provided and the two observers shared their experience.

The CIO held one meeting online on 22 February 2024. The CIO reviewed the document describing the CIO background and status as of July 2023, which was prepared by Winsnes and Desportes, and agreed that it was comprehensive and informative and presented a good overview of the work of the Committee. It was agreed that an appendix with the overview of Past Observation Activities and Hunts Observed should be added to the document, which should then be made available on the NAMMCO website. The CIO also recommended making the overall results of the OA more transparent and accessible on the website, with an updated overview of the results, compiling all the years, made easily available.

The CIO agreed that the Observation Activities of 2023 in Greenland, with no hunt observed mainly due to unfavourable ice and weather conditions but also lack of cooperation from the hunters, highlighted significant challenges in the execution of the OA. The Committee agreed that information dissemination is needed to explain to the hunters and the local community the rationale behind the observation scheme; this could mitigate some of the issues around communication and mistrust.

The CIO discussed the effectiveness of the current format of OA and explored alternative approaches to improve cost efficiency. It recognised that the current format of OA may not be the most cost-effective, given the opportunistic nature of most of the hunts and the heavy influence of weather conditions.

The CIO agreed to carry out consultations with all relevant parties, including observers, hunters/hunters' associations, and the locally involved authorities. The objective was to understand how each party envisions successful OA, what the needs are, and how the current format of the OA could be improved.

The CIO recommended:

- Reducing the regularity of the OA
- Allowing national/local observers
- Examining whether using new observation methods (e.g., drones) could also improve cost efficiency and allow the increase of observation effort.

## 8.2 OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES IN 2025 AND 2026

The CIO recommended the re-allocation of the available funds for 2025 to 2026, pooling the funds for the two years, with the goal of conducting more comprehensive OA in 2026.

Based on the rationale behind the 2023 Observation Activities in Greenland (i.e., addressing the lack of OA for beluga, narwhal, and walrus) and given the lack of success of OA in 2023, the CIO recommended directing the OA efforts in 2026 to Greenland and targeting the same hunts as in 2023.

### COMMENTS & DISCUSSION ON ITEM 8.1 AND 8.2

The Chair thanked the Chair of the CIO for her report and the Committee for its work. The Council took note of the report.

The Faroe Islands found the OA less than optimal in their current format, as being very opportunistic, and did not consider it appropriate to allocate funds when the outcome was so uncertain. They welcomed the evaluation of the process that the CIO had started. This evaluation should include concrete solutions to secure the output. Iceland and Norway seconded the Faroe Islands, agreeing that cost efficiency should be improved, noting that the evaluation started by the CIO should go further before drawing conclusions on possible solutions.

Greenland expressed that they see the role of the CIO and the Observation Scheme, started in the very early days of NAMMCO, as very important, and have a strong desire to see the OA continuing. The concurrent set of bad circumstances that impeded any observations in West Greenland in 2023 should not prevent the OA from continuing, and the CIO was looking at ways to reduce the opportunistic aspect of the OA.

The Council **agreed** that postponing the OA from 2025 to 2026 would give time to thoroughly evaluate how the OA should proceed. The Council **agreed to forward** the following request to the CIO:

*Recalling the new NAMMCO Observation Scheme adopted by Council 28 in 2021 and the respective duties outlined in the scheme of relevant stakeholders as well as the need for its full and effective implementation, the Council **requests** the CIO, taking into account the relevant changes that have been made to national legislation and regulations in the member countries,*

- *To evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the observation scheme, the appropriate methodologies for effective OA and the means to improve the effectiveness of the observation effort, through evaluating i.e.:*
  - *The regularity and intervals of the OA,*
  - *The benefit of allowing certified national and local observers to serve as observers,*
  - *The benefit of new observation methods such as drones and other means for remote monitoring,*
  - *Any other question the CIO would find relevant to examine, such as the need for flexibility in addressing Observation Activities, as appropriate.*
- *To carry out such an evaluation through consultations with all relevant parties— observers, hunters, local authorities, and other stakeholders—as appropriate, to understand how each party envisions successful Observation Activities, what the needs are, and how the current format of the Observation Activities should be improved.*

The council **requested** that the CIO deliver a report by NAMMCO 32 (2025) with relevant recommendations concerning the above.

Pending the evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Observation Scheme, the funds planned for 2025 will be reallocated to 2026. The Council **agreed** that the OA efforts in 2026 be directed to the beluga, narwhal, and walrus hunts in West Greenland, as they have not been observed before.

## 8.3 ADOPTION OF PRIORITIES AND WORKPLAN 2024–2026

### COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

In line with the above discussion, the Council **endorsed** the CIO proposed workplan, but added a new task (see below on blue panel): the thorough evaluation of the Observation Scheme and of the level of information obtained, including examining whether alternative methods could increase its efficiency (Table 6).

Table 6: CIO workplan adopted by the Council for the period 2024-2026. **In blue:** activities related to carrying out consultations with hunters and disseminating information about NAMMCO's Observation Scheme.

2024	2025	2026
CIO meeting (May/June & Fall)	CIO meeting (Spring & Fall)	CIO meeting (Spring & Fall)
Developing a communication plan and communication material (Spring – Autumn)	Participating to the meeting of the Faroese Pilot Whaling Association (March)	
Meeting with observers (May/June)	Meeting with observers (May/June)	Meeting with observers (May/June)
Participating to the meeting of the Norwegian Small Whalers Association (November/December)	Define the plan for the OA in 2026 Supervising the preparation of the 2026 OA	Supervising the preparation of the 2026 OA
Meeting with KNAPK-Greenland and with Icelandic whalers/sealers		
		Reviewing the observer reports
Evaluation of the Observation Scheme to be presented to Council in 2025		

## 8.4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

## 9. MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

The MCs met in session on 19, 20, and 21 March (see the reports of the MCs, [documents NAMMCO/31/FI01, 02, 03](#)). Deputy Secretary Garagouni, reported from the meetings.

Garagouni presented the following information to the Council:

- The proposals for conservation and management, both those which the MCs had agreed to forward to the Parties as management advice and those for which the MCs did not reach a consensus.
- The recommendations for new research/data collection endorsed by the Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC), the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), and the Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ) and forwarded to the Parties.

Garagouni also presented to the Council for consideration and, if appropriate, endorsement:

- Proposals for new and modified Requests for Advice from the Scientific Committee.

## 9.1 PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT TO PARTIES

### 9.1.1 Advice forwarded to the Parties

The MCs reached consensus on forwarding to the Parties several proposals for Conservation and Management recommended by SC/30, related respectively to harbour and grey seals (all Parties), ringed seal (Greenland), walrus (Greenland), beluga and narwhal (Greenland), white sided dolphins

(Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland), white beaked dolphin (Greenland), harbour porpoise (Norway), northern bottlenose whale (Greenland).

The full set of proposals is available in Appendix 8: New Proposals for Conservation and Management.

### 9.1.2 Proposals lacking consensus to be forwarded to the Parties

The Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC) was presented with reiterated recommendations from the SC for conservation and management related to sustainable catches and pertaining to narwhal and beluga in East Greenland. A consensus could not be reached on forwarding these recommendations to Greenland.

#### Narwhal

- *No 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 permit 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.*

However, the MCs agreed to forward the following Proposal for Conservation and Management to Greenland:

- 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 **urges** 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.

### COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION RELATED TO ITEM 9.1.1

The Council took note of the new proposals for conservation and management forwarded by the MCs to the Parties. In particular, the Council noted and commended that the Parties had reached consensus on forwarding an Advice for Conservation and Management of narwhals and belugas to Greenland.

### 9.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO PARTIES

The new recommendations for research with implications for stock monitoring, endorsed by the MCs and forwarded to the Parties, deal with several topics and species and concern all Parties:

- All Parties: bearded seal (2), ringed seal (5), harbour and grey seals (3), harp and hooded seals (19), white beaked and white sided dolphins (1)
- Faroe Islands: harbour and grey seals (1), white sided dolphin (4)
- Greenland: bearded seal (2), ringed seal (4), harbour and grey seals (2), narwhal (4), beluga (1), white beaked dolphin dolphins (2)
- Iceland: harbour and grey seals (3), harbour porpoise (1), white beaked dolphin (1)
- Norway: harbour and grey seals (5), harp and hooded seals (3)

The new Recommendations for Research are detailed in Appendix 9: Recommendations for New Research. The MCC also discussed the previously endorsed recommendations for research on harbour porpoise and pilot whale, which the relevant Parties (Iceland and Norway, and the Faroe Islands and Greenland respectively) are required to fulfil prior to the upcoming assessments of the two species.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council **took note** of the new recommendations for research forwarded by the MCs to the Parties.

### 9.3 MCS PROPOSALS FOR NEW OR MODIFIED REQUESTS FOR ADVICE FROM THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

#### 9.3.1 New requests for advice

The MCs proposed two new requests to be forwarded to the Scientific Committee.

- To prioritise the collection and analysis of information to improve the understanding of stock structure of beluga whales in East Greenland, which may allow future assessments for this species in this area.
- To prioritise investigating alternative survey methods and survey frequency for small stocks, with a focus on beluga and narwhal in East Greenland.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council **agreed** to forward these two above-mentioned requests for advice to the Scientific Committee (Appendix 10: New or Modified Requests for Advice from the Scientific Committee).

#### 9.3.2 Active requests for advice considered as answered by the MCs

One request for advice from the SC was considered satisfactorily answered by the MCs and recommended to be closed by the Council.

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

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council **agreed** to close the above-mentioned request.

#### 9.3.3 Active requests for advice to be reformulated

The MCs proposed that four existing requests to the Scientific Committee be reformulated, as follows.

##### Bearded seal

Request R-2.7.1: “To complete its review and assessment of bearded seals ~~no later than 2024~~ when the necessary data become available, and collect and analyse existing information.”

##### Ringed seal

Request R-2.3.3: “To complete its review and assessment of ringed seals ~~no later than 2024~~ when the necessary data become available, and collect and analyse existing information.”

##### Harbour and grey seals

Request R-2.4.2: “To provide a new assessment of grey seal stocks ~~throughout the North Atlantic~~ in all NAMMCO areas.”

##### Narwhal and beluga

Request R-3.4.11: “To update the assessment of both narwhal and beluga, ~~noting that~~ when new data warrant such an exercise.”

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council **agreed** to the reformulations proposed by the MCs.

All new requests or modifications to requests are summarised in Appendix 10.

## 10. ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS & ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT

The Chair noted the importance that environmental questions have for NAMMCO. Environmental matters directly related to scientific advice on the conservation and management of marine mammals were addressed by the MCJ—the points of discussion can be found in the report of the MCJ ([NAMMCO/31/FI03](#)).

NAMMCO's commitment to progress towards an ecosystem approach to management was reiterated in the Nuuk Declaration in 2017. It sees an ecosystem approach to management as an integrated approach that incorporates the entire ecosystem, including humans, into resource management decisions, and should be guided by an adaptive management approach, i.e., robust decision making in the face of uncertainty, with an aim to reducing uncertainty over time via system monitoring and learning from doing.

The Chair underlined the importance of cooperating on environmental issues, as such issues, when related to marine mammals, are rarely local but usually have a global or at least a regional scope. The Chair noted that NAMMCO was engaging with environmental programmes and initiatives under the Arctic Council and particularly the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); NAMMCO's collaboration with CAFF is further reported under Item 11.

### COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

Greenland noted that they are presently drafting an executive order on the hunting of small cetaceans, including killer whales. Greenland is concerned about the alarming concentration of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) in killer whales, which are used for human and dog consumption, when they are known to adversely affect health. An information campaign on the level of POPs in killer whales was made in East Greenland (where the majority of killer whales are hunted), and some hunters chose then to stop hunting killer whales. The Department will make a recommendation to the Cabinet not to allow the hunting of killer whales, to protect the health of human beings and sled dogs. Also, the abundance of seals is increasing in some fjords, where they become competitors to and disturb fisheries; there might be some instances where it may become appropriate to reduce their numbers.

Norway noted that this is related to the discussion on ecosystem approach to management and recommended that the Scientific Committee closely follow the development of ecosystem and adaptive management approaches.

Iceland noted that they are involved, together with scientists from Spain, in the monitoring the level of plastic pollution in cetaceans and its likely impact. It could be interesting that such a monitoring effort be tackled through NAMMCO. The “whale pump” theory and its benefit to the environment, carbon sequestration and mitigation of climate change, is often referred to, although whales' significance in enhancing primary productivity, has not been quantified. Such a quantification could be an interesting exercise for NAMMCO.

## 11. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The Chair noted that the Administrative Report (NAMMCO/31/07, Item 5) presented an overview of the relations with national, inter-governmental, and non-governmental bodies, and the meetings and events where NAMMCO was represented in 2022, also providing relevant observer reports.

NAMMCO and its Secretariat maintain a relationship with a number of stakeholders around the world, non-member Governments as well as national, inter-governmental, and non-governmental bodies, that are relevant for its work and the management and conservation of marine mammals and the marine environment, as well as education and research related to the marine environment.

### **11.1 COOPERATION WITH NON-MEMBER COUNTRIES**

The Chair extended his thanks to the Observers from non-member governments for their interest in the work of NAMMCO and their participation in this Annual Meeting, which this year included Denmark, Japan, and USA.

Desportes provided an update on the relationships NAMMCO had maintained since Council 30 with non-member countries.

NAMMCO and Japan have been engaged in a long-term association since the establishment of the Commission. They have cooperated on various issues and projects related to the management and use of marine mammals, including research and animal welfare.

A multi-year scientific cooperation, the MINTAG project (see also Item 6 and the Administrative Report [NAMMCO/31/15](#)) to develop the first-time satellite transmitters for lesser-known, fast-swimming species of interest to both NAMMCO Parties and Japan (blue, fin, sei, Bryde's, minke, and pilot whales) was started in 2021. This project, if successful, will contribute to identifying movement patterns and stock structure of these species, information that is essential for their reliable management.

To enhance their collaboration and facilitate cooperation between their marine mammal experts, Japan and NAMMCO signed, during the 30<sup>th</sup> Council meeting in March 2023, a [Letter of Intent](#) (LOI) in order to formalise and facilitate such project-based cooperation in the future.

Following the signing of the LOI, NAMMCO General Secretary Desportes was invited to Japan in December 2023, by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supported by the Fisheries Agency, to discuss possibilities for strengthening the cooperation between NAMMCO and Japan, and identify relevant fields of cooperation, both scientific and others. The purpose of the visit was to facilitate direct discussions with different Japanese stakeholders involved in the management of, research on, and hunting of marine mammals. The one-week visit allowed for in depth and fruitful exchanges of views and discussions that will be continued during the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting and beyond. Further information can be found in the Administrative Report [NAMMCO/31/15](#), Appendix A#3.

Desportes also noted that three Japanese scientists had, as in previous years, participated in the SC/30 meeting as observers (see also Item 4.4) and presented different research and projects.

Desportes further noted that all working groups and workshops organised or co-organised by NAMMCO have, as a standing rule, invited external experts as participants; in 2023, these were from institutes in Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

### **COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Council took note of the report.

Japan reiterated its willingness to strengthen its cooperation with NAMMCO. It noted that it will attend the IWC Commission meeting as an observer and hopefully can cooperate with NAMMCO countries there.

The Chair underlined that NAMMCO as an international organisation cannot exist in a vacuum and needs to communicate and cooperate with other organisations, and countries. NAMMCO looks forward to the discussion with Japan on ways to strengthen their cooperation.

### **11.2 COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

The Chair extended his thanks to the Observers from intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations for their interest in the work of NAMMCO and their participation or representation to this Annual Meeting; this year, these included CAFF, IWC, IWMC, Makivvik Corporation, NAFO, and NEAFC.

Desportes provided an update on the relationships NAMMCO had maintained since Council 30 with governmental and intergovernmental organisations working on marine management and detailed the

2023 highlights as given below. More information can be found in the Administrative Report [NAMMCO/31/15](#).

### **11.2.1 Arctic Council and Working Groups**

NAMMCO maintains a relationship with the Arctic Council Secretariat, and the AMAP and CAFF Working Groups. The Secretariat and two SC members are involved in the activities of the CAFF sub-groups and are active members of the Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program (CBMP) and of its Marine Mammal Expert Network. There has been, however, a pause in the activity of the Arctic Council and its Working Groups because of the war in Ukraine. Therefore, although contact has been maintained between the Secretariats, no joint activities were conducted in 2023. Consequently, the Panarctic Bearded Seal Workshop, which was conceived as a joint NAMMCO-CAFF activity, after several postponements was finally organised by NAMMCO alone, although the form, programme, and participants—except for the Russian scientists who were not invited—remained those initially agreed upon.

### **11.2.2 ASCOBANS**

NAMMCO maintains a relationship with ASCOBANS, both at the Secretariat level for exchanging information and by participating (Desportes and Garagouni) in the 28<sup>th</sup> ASCOBANS Advisory Meeting in September 2023, following the agenda items directly relevant to the work of NAMMCO. One relevant topic is ASCOBANS review of disturbances, including pollution and hazardous substances, as well as recreational sea use. NAMMCO Secretariat will follow the progress made on these issues. The intersessional Working Group on *Lagenorhynchus*, that was formed by AC 26 (2021) had not had any meetings or activities since then.

As a rule, NAMMCO Secretariat keeps the ASCOBANS Secretariat informed of the NAMMCO activities on species of special interest to ASCOBANS. The ASCOBANS Secretariat was informed that the NAMMCO SC was convening a working group on dolphins and was provided with the list of participants, including invited experts. The report of the Working Group was also forwarded to ASCOBANS when it was released.

### **11.2.3 ICES**

NAMMCO and ICES have a joint WG, the ICES/NAFO/NAMMCO Working Group on harp and hooded seals (WGHARP) in charge of management recommendations for both species. The WGHARP held a meeting in August 2023 in Tromsø. Related to this, ICES also organised and hosted in May a Benchmark Workshop on Seal Modelling (WKSEALS) to develop assessment models for harp and hooded seals, that would perform better than the models previously used by the WGHARP.

Members of the Scientific Committee also participate in different ICES activities of relevance for the work of NAMMCO, such as the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME), the Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC), as well as the ICES Annual Science Conference (ASC), which in 2023 had a large session on by-catch.

### **11.2.4 Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association**

The NAMMCO Secretariat was invited by the Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association (OFA, Finland) to participate in an online webinar "[Seal management under a trade ban – how to promote sustainable resource use?](#)" and present NAMMCO's perspective on the value of seals as resources (food and materials) and on seal management and the effect of the trade ban, "Reconciling conservation and use of marine mammal resources in the North Atlantic". The webinar was the concluding session of the two-year project, "[Sälen - ett värdefullt vilt](#)" [Seals – a valuable game] during which the OFA and their partners from the Baltic region explored the interest and use of seals as valuable game, along with the challenges of managing such a resource under the EU ban. See in the Administrative Report [NAMMCO/31/07](#), Appendix B#6 for further details.



The seminar was very informative for the Secretariat regarding the seal issues in the Baltic and the feelings of the Baltic participants concerning the seal ban. It underlined the awareness of the strong similarities between the Baltic seal issues and the seal issues in Greenland and the Arctic, with all areas facing similar issues regarding the management of the seal resource since the introduction of the EU seal ban. The contact established was a step in establishing a connection between NAMMCO countries and Baltic countries, building bridges, and finding synergies.

#### **11.2.5 Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network - RSN**

NAMMCO regularly attends the meetings organised by the RSN and respond to questionnaires on specific subjects related to fisheries.

NAMMCO has actively contributed to the Magazine edited by the RSN since 2011 by submitting material for publication that describes the importance of its work on the conservation and management of marine mammals and highlighting ongoing priorities. In 2023, NAMMCO contributed to Issue No 22 (December 2023) dedicated to "Changes for changing climate". [FAO. 2024. *Changes from changing climate* – Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network Magazine, No. 22. Rome.] Highlighted therein were the effects of climate change on marine mammals and marine mammal users.

#### **11.2.6 The Norwegian Centre for the Law of the Sea**

The Norwegian Centre for the Law of the Sea, NCLOS, and the NAMMCO Secretariat continued in 2023 the contacts and cooperation initiated in 2020. They organised jointly the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Mammal Student Symposium on 7 April 2022, with the theme "*Marine mammals in a changing Arctic: Finding a pathway for users, scientists, and policymakers to navigate new challenges*" (See also Item 12.3.1).

### **COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Council took note of the update.

To a question from Norway on why cooperation with the IWC was not highlighted for 2023, Desportes answered that for many reasons including the change in staff in both Secretariats, there was limited communication during 2023, although there are specific matters of cooperation planned. Also, the IWC observed the Annual Meeting in March 2023 in Tromsø.

The IWC highlighted the importance in many aspects of the collaboration between NAMMCO and IWC, and in particular this year, with the discussion about aboriginal subsistence hunting. They will be in contact with the NAMMCO Secretariat in the immediate future.

### **11.3 OTHER BUSINESS**

The Secretariat had also represented NAMMCO at several meetings of national organisations, as described in the Administrative Report.

### **COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION ON 11.2 AND 11.3**

The Chair noted that it was important for the Commission to reach out and to be visible within organisations dealing with issues related to NAMMCO. He thanked the Secretariat for its efforts related to this.

## **12. COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH**

El bani Altuna (Deputy Secretary) and Metić (Intern) provided an update on the communication and outreach activities carried out by the Secretariat since Council 30, noting that information regarding the entirety of 2023 could be found in the Administrative Report ([NAMMCO/31/07](#)).

## 12.1 WEBSITE

The Secretariat continued to have a strong focus on the [website](#) and on updating and enhancing its content. Two species pages were revised and updated after being reviewed by SC/29 (bowhead whale and grey seal). A species page was created for the common dolphin, a visitor in the waters of NAMMCO countries.

In 2023, the website had 36,654 unique users, an increase over 10% from 2022 (33,183) and 85% from 2019 (19,747). Most users (59.5%) found the website through an organic search, while 28.9% navigated to the site directly. Social media referred 9% of users.

The five top countries visiting the website for 2023 were the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, and Germany. As in previous years, users in the 18–24 and 25–34 age ranges were the most numerous. The website continued to be used as a general source of information on marine mammal species, with the individual species pages being some of the most visited ones besides the NAMMCO Internship page.

Created July 2023

The common dolphin is likely the most abundant and widespread species in the world, it occurs in tropical and temperate coastal and pelagic marine waters worldwide. Common dolphins have a lean body and are easily to identify by their pale-yellow patch on the anterior and the very unique criss-cross pattern on their sides, which distinguishes them easily from similarly shaped dolphins. This very social species is found in groups of tens to thousands of animals, that are fast swimmers and like acrobatics, and schools are being usually very active.

The species is not a resident but a visitor in the waters of NAMMCO member countries.



### ABUNDANCE

The global population is about six million, with 640,000 common dolphins in the North Atlantic (Hammond, 2017; Hayes, 2022).

### DISTRIBUTION

Common dolphins are found worldwide in warm-temperate and tropical waters, generally between 60°N and 50°S. Their distribution varies depending on the season and sea-surface temperatures.

### RELATION TO HUMANS

The species is hunted for human consumption or shark bait in certain parts of the world, but not in the North Atlantic. By-catch in fishery is, however, very common.

### CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

The common dolphin is a widespread and abundant species. As a result, the species is listed as "Least Concern" on both [global](#) and [regional](#) European Red List in the most recent assessment (2021 and 2023, respectively) of the IUCN.

Meanwhile, by-catch is the main threat that common dolphins face today, with 1000s being by-caught every year off Europe, with a hot spot in the Bay of Biscay.

The common dolphin is protected in the North Atlantic. It is only a visitor in the waters of NAMMCO member countries, therefore no assessment effort has been dedicated to this species.

## 12.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Stories posted on Facebook act as teasers for news, articles, and reports published on the NAMMCO website. They direct the reader to a specific section of the website, thus contributing to enhancing its visitor flow.

The interest in the NAMMCO [Facebook](#) page has increased, reaching 2,838 likes and 3,224 followers. The Facebook "Fun-fact Friday" posts are often complimented for their diverse and interesting content. They were also regularly shared by other organisations working with marine mammals, such as the Society for Marine Mammalogy (worldwide), the American Cetacean Society, the Wild Dolphin Project (BAMA), and Humpbacks and High-rises (Australia). The top three Facebook posts of 2023 (measured as the number of persons reached by the post) ranged between 11,000 and 57,000 users. The most popular post "Did you know that the flippers of cetaceans have great similarities with the bone structure of human hands?" had close to 70,000 organic reach, 1,706 likes, was shared 390 times, and generated over 1,800 post clicks. The post about the peculiar feeding style of an Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin "Have you ever imagined a dolphin doing meal prep?" was by far the most popular one, with 939 reactions, 80 comments, and 161 shares. 57 people clicked the link that took them to NAMMCO's species page on Bottlenose dolphins.

Activities on the NAMMCO [Instagram](#) account, which was launched in September 2022, have increased in 2023 compared to 2022; however, the platform was used less than Facebook. The account had 298 followers as of 28/02/2024. The posts that reached the most accounts in 2022 were the news on the Food Event in October 2022.

## 12.3 OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

### 12.3.1 Student Symposium

An annual Student Symposium was initiated by the Secretariat in 2019. The objective was to expose the Tromsø community of postgraduate students working with the marine environment, and in

particular marine mammals, to the work of NAMMCO and provide them with a forum for sharing and presenting their projects, as well as opportunities for networking. The NAMMCO intern is designated, under the guidance of the Secretariat, as the lead organiser. NCLOS and the Arctic Biology Department of the University of Tromsø (AB-UiT) agreed to have students cooperating in the organisation. During the pandemic years 2020 and 2021, the symposium was held online, and created an opportunity to include students from all over the world. After COVID restrictions were lifted, it was decided to continue the Symposium as a hybrid event.

In 2023, the Secretariat, NCLOS, and AB-UiT, with Intern Jana Djukaric, as lead organiser, jointly organised the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Mammal Student Symposia on the theme “*Marine mammals in a changing Arctic: Finding a pathway for users, scientists, and policymakers to navigate new challenges*”. 110 participants registered from the NAMMCO countries, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, and Norway, but also Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, and Taiwan. The three invited keynote speakers were from NCLOS (in person), Denmark and Greenland (online).

### 12.3.2 Lectures to diverse audiences

The Secretariat gives a number of lectures every year in different national and international fora for high school and university students, scientists, associations, and the general public.

The lectures present NAMMCO, its foundation, vision of conservation, and advisory processes. The focus is to provide food for thought by presenting marine mammal use—and bans thereof—in the perspective of sustainable food systems, blue economy, Sustainable Development Goals, and food security, showing that whaling and sealing, if well-managed, can represent sustainable food systems and contribute to blue economy and blue justice. The perspectives presented are usually new for most audiences and they challenge the prevailing negative views on whaling and sealing activities. The discussions afterwards are usually lively and interesting. Participants express that the perspectives presented were an eye opener on the issue and its complexity, the important question being at the end which food/resource is in a specific place *de facto* the most environmentally friendly; that is, they recognise that while the sustainability of food systems is a global issue, it has local solutions.

As mentioned under Item 11.2.4, the NAMMCO perspective was also presented during the webinar “Seal management...”, organised by the OFA. NAMMCO presentation and active participation in the discussion was appreciated and thanked by the organisers.

### COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION ON ITEMS 12.1-12.3

The Faroe Islands expressed congratulations on having doubled the number of visitors since 2019, when the website was designated as the main communication tool of the Commission, and for the fact that it was used as a main source of information on marine mammals.

Norway noted that Japan was not on the list of user countries, but Japan mentioned that NAMMCO is not a known body in Japan. Desportes also mentioned that the information given only encompasses the North Atlantic.

The Council **commended** and thanked the Secretariat for the attention given to the website and for its efforts in terms of communication and outreach. The Chair underlined that the website continues to represent a useful internal and external tool that NAMMCO should be proud of, and which is noticed by external actors. It is essential to keep it updated and accurate and continually enhanced.

The Chair asked whether expanding the linguistic profile of the website could be a wise step, as it may increase the number of visitors. Desportes noted that this was a big decision, as it is also costly; however, mainly the main pages could be translated. Norway supported this idea, seconded by Greenland, which advised prioritising the languages of NAMMCO countries. The educational portal (see under next item) will be translated to the languages of the NAMMCO Countries, including Northern Sami, as well as Danish.

The Faroe Islands wondered whether the higher visibility through Instagram generated negative comments. The Secretariat answered that this sometimes happens, but that appropriate responses are provided when relevant.

#### 12.4 EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Council 29 (2022) adopted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Communication Plan [CP3](#) 2023–2024. One of NAMMCO Communication Strategy's target audiences, and specifically that of CP3, is 'Youth, children and educators, member countries' educational networks'. The Secretariat developed communication events relevant to CP3, including developing the concept of and applying for funding for an educational project on marine mammals and the marine environment. The educational project is presently centred around one large interregional project: *GUARDNA—Guardians of the North Atlantic: Looking after our Seas to Conserve Marine Mammals*, an educational portal that would be made freely available on the NAMMCO website for schools and youth ([NAMMCO/31/16](#)).

GUARDNA is a three-year project (2023–2026) aiming to educate and contribute to the empowerment of the younger generation (7- to 20-year-old children and young adults), bringing the North Atlantic into the classroom and the students out into the North Atlantic. GUARDNA intends to develop a marine portal with appealing and playful educational materials, both information and indoor and outdoor activities, aiming to spark curiosity and interest of the youngest in ocean sustainability, using marine mammals as emissaries for the entire marine ecosystem, with the understanding that protecting/conserving marine mammals implies conserving their habitat, i.e., the marine environment. GUARDNA has partners from the four NAMMCO Member countries and Denmark and has so far received funding from Novo Nordisk (with Greenland Institute of Learning as project leader for that part), the Nordic Council of Ministers, and NAMMCO; applications have also been submitted to other funding sources.

The educational materials will be centred around Information Cards, delivering in a more concise and accessible format the information contained on the NAMMCO website about marine mammal species in the North Atlantic, the threats they face, users (hunters, fishers, tourists, scientists, managers, etc.) and utilisation (food, culture, tourism, etc.). GUARDNA will develop Activity Cards, linked to the Information Cards, that will feature cross-sectorial hands-on activities, as well as activities related to the MINTAG and NASS projects. The project will also provide accompanying resources, including lesson plan suggestions, and pre-made teacher presentations, to facilitate effective integration of the materials into the curriculum. GUARDNA also aims to foster a network of schools spanning various regions and countries, through two main sets of workshops: national workshops of teachers in 2024/2025, and a final workshop in Autumn 2026 with representatives from all the five countries.

The educational portal will be translated in the languages of NAMMCO Countries, including Northern Sami, as well as Danish.

#### COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Chair noted that this is an interesting project. It is new to NAMMCO to reach out to this particular target group, and nice to know that a substantial amount of funding has been secured. The Chair, seconded by the Council, wishes the Secretariat and all partners the best of luck with the implementation of the project.

#### 12.5 SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

**Volume 13** of the NAMMCO Scientific Publications (NSP) series continued the open call of the previous volume in the series, namely "Marine Mammals in the North Atlantic". El bani Altuna and Garagouni are primary editors.

The deadline for submissions was initially 31 December 2023, but was extended to 20 March 2024, due to the too low number of submissions. The total number of submissions is now 9 research articles,

ranging in subject from marine mammal habitat use to social perspectives on management in the North Atlantic. Pending timely reviews and revisions, Volume 13 will be published during 2024.

SC/30 decided that Volume 14 should focus on the theme of “Anthropogenic Impacts on Marine Mammals”. This will form a suitable platform for the publication of both catch statistics and research on the effects of human disturbance on marine mammals.

## COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION

The Council took note of the progress towards Volume 13 and the plan for Volume 14. The Chair asked how the volume themes were selected, and Rosing-Asvid (SC Chair) specified that the SC chose the theme. The Chair further questioned whether the lack of contributions to some volumes could be because the topic is too narrow or because of the limited general outreach of the journal itself. Rosing-Asvid mentioned that, for some volumes in the past, the time between submission and publication of manuscripts has proved discouraging for potential authors.

Desportes mentioned the low impact factor of NSP as an issue, pointing out that even SC members prefer to submit for publication to other journals. However, she also noted that the particular "type" of the journal allows for the publication of recurrent data or analyses (e.g., abundance estimates or catch statistics) that are of no interest to other journals, but that it is important to get published and made available. Norway agreed that the focus of the NSP should continue to be of relevance to the NAMMCO countries and NAMMCO's work and noted that part of the justification for the theme of Vol. 14 is to be able to publish catch statistics.

### 12.6 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

## 13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Council was informed of the sudden passing away on 17 March of Professor Simon Northridge, Head of the St Andrews School of Biology and active member of the NAMMCO Working Group on By-Catch. A lot of Simon's work since the late 1980's focussed on marine mammals and their incidental killing in fisheries. Simon was the first chair of the ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species that he chaired for three successive periods. In this capacity he co-chaired a joint NAMMCO/ICES workshop on by-catch monitoring in 2010. Simon was notably good at trying to understand an issue from all angles and multiple points of view, while at the same time remaining well rooted in science; he had a remarkably balanced approach on the by-catch topic that often polarises opinions. There is no doubt that his work on marine mammal–fisheries interactions has been influential in understanding the issue and reducing unwanted by-catch in the North Atlantic. Simon is remembered as a kind, bright, thoughtful, warm, and open colleague. Simon and Simon's input will be greatly missed by the NAMMCO By-Catch Working Group. The thoughts and sympathies of NAMMCO and the NAMMCO WG on By-Catch are with his family.

Iceland brought up a discussion on the consensus decision principle, that forms the basis of NAMMCO decision process. Its advantage is that it allows to move together, as an organisation, and as been the rule in NAMMCO; however, Iceland thought that it would be useful to establish some guidelines to avoid any possibility of perceiving conflicts of interest. Norway agreed that this process has both advantage (moving together) and disadvantage (some ambiguities in some cases), however they supported to keep this principle. The Faroe Islands also supports keeping this principle and ask for a clarification regarding possible conflicts of interest. Iceland clarified that it would be useful to develop a process to avoid such conflict, and that it might be useful to look how this is delt with by other organisations which follow the same decision process. Greenland reminded that a decision process based on consensus was part of the agreement and should be kept; it was however open to a discussion on this, based on the review on how it was expressed in the Agreement and the different Rules of Procedures. The Council agreed to set such a discussion on the agenda of the next council

meeting, and Iceland was charged to prepare the fundamentals of this discussion with the help of the Secretariat. Norway requested that this background was ready for the September HoDs meeting.

## 14. CLOSING PROCEDURES

### 14.1 PRESS RELEASE

A press release summarising the main issues of the 2024 Council Meeting was **adopted** by the Council (Appendix 11: Press Release, and [web portal](#)).

### 14.2 NEXT MEETING

The next Annual Meeting, including the meetings of the MCs and the Council, will be hosted by the Secretariat in Tromsø in week 13, 24-28 March 2025, with the venue to be decided as soon as possible.

The Chair, on behalf of all participants, thanked the Secretariat staff for their work in preparing for the meeting and their dedicated support during the meeting. He also thanked all the delegates and observers for a constructive and productive meeting. The participants thanked the Chair for his able chairing of the meeting and appropriate handling of the activists' issues during the opening session.

Desportes warmly thanked the staff of the Secretariat, who were all participating in a NAMMCO Annual Meeting for the first time, for their dedicated and good work during the preparation of and the meeting itself, stating that she was proud to lead such an efficient and quick-learning team.

The Chair declared the meeting closed.

The report of the 31<sup>st</sup> Council Meeting of NAMMCO was **adopted** by correspondence on 22 May 2024 at 13:34.

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## APPENDIX 2: AGENDA

Agenda Items	Document Reference
1. Opening Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Welcome address by the Chair</li> <li>1.2 Admission of Observers</li> <li>1.3 Opening Statements</li> <li>1.4 Adoption of agenda</li> <li>1.5 Meeting Arrangements</li> <li>1.6 Theme Session:                “Welfare issues in marine mammal hunting”                (Invited speakers: Kathrine Ryeng (DVM, IMR, NO) and Snjólaug Árnadóttir (PhD in Laws, RU, IS))</li> </ul>	NAMMCO/31/01, 02, 03
2. Annual Progress Reports	APR reports
3. Financial and Administrative issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Report from the Finance and Administration Committee (FAC)</li> <li>3.2 Audited accounts 2023</li> <li>3.3 [Budget 2024], Draft budget 2025 and forecast budget 2026</li> <li>3.4 Administrative Report 2023</li> <li>3.5 Proposal for a vocabulary amendment to RoPs of Council and Committees</li> <li>3.6 Other business</li> </ul>	NAMMCO/31/04, 05, 06, 07, 17
4. Scientific Committee (SC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Report of the Scientific Committee</li> <li>4.2 Adoption of priorities and work plan 2024-2026</li> <li>4.3 Other business</li> </ul>	NAMMCO/31/08
5. Update on the planning of NASS 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.1 Planning of the surveys</li> <li>5.2 Planning of the data analysis and review</li> </ul>	NAMMCO/31/14
6. MINTAG Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6.1 Report of the MINTAG Steering Group</li> <li>6.2 Financial update</li> </ul>	NAMMCO/31/15
7. Committee on Hunting Methods (CHM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7.1 Report of the Committee on Hunting Methods</li> <li>7.2 Presentation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> training video</li> <li>7.3 Adoption of priorities and work plan 2024-2026</li> <li>7.4 Other business</li> </ul>	NAMMCO/31/09, 18
8. Committee on Inspection and Observation (CIO) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8.1 Report of the Committee on Inspection and Observation</li> <li>8.2 Observation activities in 2025</li> <li>8.3 Adoption of priorities and work plan 2024-2026</li> <li>8.4 Other business</li> </ul>	NAMMCO/31/10

<p>9. Management Committees (MCs)</p> <p>9.1 Advice for Conservation and Management to Parties</p> <p>9.2 Recommendations for Scientific Research to Parties</p> <p>9.3 Proposals for new or modified Requests for Advice from the SC</p> <p>9.4 Other business</p>	<p>NAMMCO/31/12, 13, FIO1, FIO2, FIO3, MC05, MC06</p>
<p>10. Environmental Questions &amp; Ecosystem Approach to management</p>	
<p>11. External Relations</p> <p>11.1 Cooperation with non-member countries</p> <p>11.2 Cooperation with international organisations</p> <p>11.3 Other business</p>	<p>NAMMCO/31/07</p>
<p>12. Communication and Outreach</p> <p>12.1 Website</p> <p>12.2 Social media</p> <p>12.3 Outreach activities</p> <p>12.4 Educational Project</p> <p>12.5 Scientific publications</p> <p>12.6 Other business</p>	<p>NAMMCO/31/07, 16</p>
<p>13. Any other business</p>	
<p>14. Closing procedures</p> <p>14.1 Press Release</p> <p>14.2 Next Meeting</p>	<p>NAMMCO/31/11</p>

**APPENDIX 3: LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Agenda item</b>
NAMMCO/31/01	List of participants	1
NAMMCO/31/02	Annotated draft agenda	1.4
NAMMCO/31/03	Draft list of documents	All
NAMMCO/31/04	Report of the Finance and Administration Committee	3.1
NAMMCO/31/05	Audited Accounts 2023	3.2
NAMMCO/31/06	Expected account 2024, draft budget 2025, forecast budget 2026	3.3
NAMMCO/31/07	Administrative Report 2023	3.4, 11, 12
NAMMCO/31/08	Report of the Scientific Committee	4
NAMMCO/31/09	Report of the Committee on Hunting Methods	7
NAMMCO/31/10	Report of the Committee on Inspection and Observation	8
NAMMCO/31/11	Press Release	14.1
NAMMCO/31/12	MCs' Decisions on SC/30 Recommendations to Parties for Conservation and Management and Research	9,1, 9.2
NAMMCO/31/13	MCs' Proposals for New or Modified Requests for Advice from the SC	9.3
NAMMCO/31/14	Update on the Planning of the North Atlantic Survey of Selected Cetaceans NASS-2024	5
NAMMCO/31/15	Update on the MINTAG project	6
NAMMCO/31/16	Report on NAMMCO's educational project	12.3
NAMMCO/31/17	Proposal for a vocabulary amendment to RoPs of Council and Committees	3.5
NAMMCO/31/18	2 <sup>nd</sup> CHM Training video: "Large Whale Hunting. Target Area and Shooting Angle"	7
<b>For Information Documents</b>		
NAMMCO/31/MC05	List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research generated by the MCs at their 2023 meeting, with Responses from the Parties	9

NAMMCO/31/MC06	List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee	9
NAMMCO/31/FI01	Report of the MCC	9
NAMMCO/31/FI02	Report of the MCSW	9
NAMMCO/31/FI03	Report of the MCJ	9
NAMMCO/31/NPR/FO-2023	National Progress Report Faroe Islands – 2023	2
NAMMCO/31/NPR/GL-2023	National Progress Report Greenland – 2023	2
NAMMCO/31/NPR/IS-2023	National Progress Report Iceland – 2023	2
NAMMCO/31/NPR/NO-2023	National Progress Report Norway – 2023	2
NAMMCO/31/Database	NAMMCO Catches, by-catches & strandings up to and including 2023	2
NAMMCO/31/NPR/JP-2022-23	Japan Progress Report on Large Cetaceans – April 2022-March 2023	2
NAMMCO/31/NPR/JP-2021-22	Japan Progress Report on Small Cetaceans – April 2021-March 2022	2
NAMMCO/31/APR/MA-2023	Makivvik Corporation Annual Progress Reports – 2023	2

## APPENDIX 4: OPENING STATEMENTS

### OPENING STATEMENT FROM THE FAROE ISLANDS

Mister Chair, Distinguished Delegates and Observers - Ladies and Gentlemen

The Faroe Islands are a large ocean nation and few people in the world are as closely tied to the sea as the Faroe Islanders.

As a founding member of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission, the Faroe Islands are committed to rational management, conservation, and responsible use of the living resources of the sea.

Whaling has been ingrained in the life of our islands since our Norse ancestors settled the Faroe Islands in the Middle Ages and whaling continues to be an integral part of Faroese food culture.

Today, whaling in the Faroe Islands is a community-based activity. Our unique form of whaling is largely non-commercial—that is the way it has developed over centuries as a part of our food culture.

Still, we also fully respect the rights of others to trade commercially in their marine mammal resources. Our common goal is to ensure that the use of whales and seals is sustainable and that hunts are conducted responsibly - and base our decisions on the best available scientific advice.

NAMMCO is a well-established organisation and constructive in its work. This testifies to the importance of our organisation and the value of our cooperation.

This summer the next NASS survey will be conducted and these recurring whale counting surveys, which span more than 30 years, are the flagship of the scientific corporation in NAMMCO.

The MINTAG project is advancing and demonstrates the ambition propelling the efforts of our organisation, and highlights NAMMCO's leadership in the fields of marine mammal studies.

On behalf of the Faroese delegation, I wish to express our gratitude to our Icelandic hosts for their hospitality in convening this meeting. It is truly a pleasure and honour to come together here in Reykjavík for this significant event. Furthermore, our sincere appreciation goes to the secretariat for their diligent and dedicated efforts in facilitating the work of our organisation.

We look forward to the discourses at this annual meeting, aiming to engage in meaningful discussions on NAMMCO's initiatives and achieve fruitful outcomes that advance our common responsibility.

Thank you.

### OPENING STATEMENT FROM GREENLAND

Mr Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, on behalf of the Greenlandic delegation, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the NAMMCO Secretariat for all their preparation in organising the meeting, and Iceland for hosting the 31st annual meeting of our organisation. It is a pleasure to be here in beautiful Reykjavík.

NAMMCO has succeeded in its work on animal welfare issues through the Committee on Hunting Methods. The former and members of today have worked very professional and dedicated. Justines Olsen from Faroe Islands, Egil Ole Øen from Norway, Kristian Loftsson from Iceland and many other whalers have inspired us. Without their professionalism and dedication, we have not accomplished the credible work of NAMMCO of today.

NAMMCO members have worked to safeguard both with animal welfare and be aware of the legal aspects, associated to the hunting of marine mammals and how best to deal with those. We have learned from each other and give space for more. I revisited the first NAMMCO meeting report from 1992, which said that it will include consideration of measure necessary to ensure the safety of those

directly involved in hunting, safety of the whalers. The mandate is two-sided and important because we are the Arctic and North Atlantic.

There have been concrete and important works such as Hunting manuals, video-based instructions regarding the use of harpoon cannons and whale grenades, new knives, and hooks.

Most of the work has leaned on science and research. It is very important work, which has been done in good cooperation with hunters and other experts. The work in NAMMCO has a very significant value for Greenland.

Continued sharing of experiences and knowledge on hunting methods are very important within NAMMCO and observers, as we clearly have seen generation shift within whalers, their organisations, and in the various government bodies. I hope NAMMCO Council will continue to be aware of the situation, so we safeguard the knowledge and expertise gained in NAMMCO.

We hope for a positive and constructive meeting.

Qujanaq – Thank you.

### **OPENING STATEMENT FROM ICELAND**

Distinguished Chair, Delegates, Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Icelandic delegation, to welcome you here to our annual meeting in Reykjavík. I would also like to thank the Secretariat for the work in preparing this meeting.

Looking ahead to the work that we have in front of us in the next three days it is clear that the work of NAMMCO concerning the cooperation on conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic is just as important now as when the organization was established more than 30 years ago.

It is worth mentioning that the foundation for our work in NAMMCO is the science. Iceland is fully committed to this and will continue to put emphasis on the work of science in its engagement within NAMMCO. The valuable knowledge derived from the work of NAMMCO has served to support how we address the wide range of issues related to conservation and management of marine mammals.

To carry out this work we continue to rely on the individuals and their respective organizations to lay the groundwork for which the decisions of NAMMCO are based on. This also includes the cooperation with external parties. Iceland would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved.

Referring to the recent debate in Iceland there are topics of interest that have been raised that have an impact on the work at NAMMCO. Therefore, it is of value that the discussion on animal welfare is at the centre in this opening session.

For an organization like NAMMCO it is important to be at the forefront of this debate in line with our mandate to develop management procedures which take into account the relationship between marine mammals and other marine living resources; in line with the general principles of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources as reflected in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

This time as before there is plenty of work ahead of us at this meeting. We look forward to a constructive debate with our NAMMCO partners.

Mr. Chair thank you for this opportunity to address the annual meeting on behalf of Iceland.

## OPENING STATEMENT FROM NORWAY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Norwegian delegation, allow me to express our gratitude to the Icelandic authorities for inviting us to Reykjavík. It is always something special to visit this awesome country, come rain come shine.

As usual for the Council meetings, there is a full agenda ahead of us with plenty of interesting and important items to be discussed - something we should exploit in full. This should guarantee some interesting next couple of days. There are many topics on the agenda this delegation finds to have particular interest. We most certainly welcome the focus for this year's theme session "Welfare issues in marine mammal hunting" to be spot on and to be a subject of interest to so many levels involved in the management and conservation of marine mammals. Animal welfare issues in general is a matter of concern for the public opinion, and rightly so, and marine mammals should certainly not be an exception in that regard!

At this Council meeting, attention will also be given to financial and administrative issues. This is rarely among the most popular issues to handle and discuss, but indeed necessary. Member countries are facing a rather harsh budgetary situation which also influence on the various activities under the NAMMCO umbrella. The conclusion should be that NAMMCO must be aiming for running its various activities as economically feasible as possible, but in parallel must continue its activities without compromising on quality. The financial situation will affect us one way or another, but we are convinced NAMMCO should be able to face even this situation in a most constructive way.

From our point of view, it is the Scientific Committee that is the heart and soul of this organization. It is the Scientific Committee which has provided us with high quality data from the ocean surrounding us. The Scientific Committee has been absolutely pivotal in making us interpret and understand the development in the ocean, and far beyond the status of marine mammals, as this Committee over the years has provided us with tools to understand the complex ecosystems, climate change, etc, in the North-Atlantic. This Council should listen carefully to the advice from the Scientific Committee, also when the advice has not been that easy neither to accept nor to follow. But this is how it has to be, also in the future.

Then another issue which is troubling us. In approximately 25 years from now, Mother Earth will be populated by ca 10 billion human beings, who all would need and rely on an adequately access to healthy food and proteins. Where shall these resources come from? Sustainable use of marine resources should and must have a pivotal role to play in that regard. If we shall be able to fulfil United Nations Sustainable Goal number 2 – to get rid of starvation, and number 14 – a sustainable use of the ocean and marine resources we simply have no choice. Marine mammals should be considered as a food commodity in line with poultry, pork, or beef.

Thank you for your attention.

## OPENING STATEMENT FROM JAPAN

Mr Chair, Delegates, Observers – and Ladies and Gentlemen,

Japan would like to thank the Government of Iceland in its capacity as the Chair and the NAMMCO Secretariat for hosting the 31st Council meeting. Before giving Japan's opening statement, Japan would like to express our utmost hope that Iceland overcome the current difficulties in the face of ongoing volcanic activities and earthquakes.

NAMMCO has contributed greatly to the conservation and management of marine mammals since its establishment in 1992. We pay tribute anew to all the NAMMCO Members that have made such a significant contribution for over 30 years. Today, we are honoured and privileged to attend the meeting and look forward to being part of the discussion.

Even after its withdrawal from the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) in 2019, Japan has remained committed to international cooperation for the proper management of cetaceans, working with relevant international organisations, including the NAMMCO as well as the IWC. As in the past, our delegation wishes to inform you of Japan's intention to make its best efforts to reaffirm the unity among countries supporting the sustainable use of marine living resources towards the IWC in 2024. To this end, Japan is currently organising a meeting in Tokyo in June 2024 on the Sustainable Use of Marine Living Resources including Cetaceans.

To further strengthen its science-based approach, Japan is willing to enhance collaboration with NAMMCO and its Members. From this perspective, Japan would like to continue scientific and financial contribution to the MINTAG Project, which aims at developing a new satellite tag to be used on fast swimming rorquals and pilot whales, species demanding a long-range deployment and a tag with as little drag as possible. In addition to that, at the 30th Meeting of the NAMMCO Scientific Committee, a collaborative research project between NAMMCO and Japan for understanding the factors behind annual changes in distribution and feeding ecology of North Pacific common minke whale, and comparison with the situation of this species in the North Atlantic was discussed. These kinds of scientific collaboration would further contribute to the proper management of marine living resources in the North Atlantic and the North Pacific oceans. As a token of our closer cooperation, Japan invited the General Secretary, Dr Geneviève DESPORTES, here we have, to Tokyo last December for a Dialogue on future cooperation. We are most willing to expand the scope of our cooperation with NAMMCO and its Members through specific projects in the field of scientific collaboration, including socioeconomic policy, across wider communication channels.

Finally, Japan would like to reiterate its conviction that the collaboration between NAMMCO and Japan is a vital force in international fora to promote conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources based on science.

Thank you for your attention.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

The United States thanks the NAMMCO members for the invitation to observe your 31st Annual Meeting. We are also grateful to Iceland for arranging and hosting this meeting. We are pleased to be here in Reykjavík to observe the Council and committee meetings and engage with NAMMCO Members and other observers on the conservation and management of marine mammals.

We appreciate how NAMMCO provides a forum for cooperation in the study of marine mammals and the development of conservation and management measures. We particularly acknowledge NAMMCO's consideration of indigenous knowledge in, and ecosystem-based approach of, your work. The marine mammals in the North Atlantic, and elsewhere, face a range of anthropogenic stressors, such as entanglement in fishing gear, ship strikes, pollution, underwater shipping noise, and climate change. The United States has a number of activities underway to address these stressors, many of which benefit from cooperation with other countries. The United States also shares an interest in work on hunting methods, hunter safety, increasing efficiencies of hunts, and other aspects that relate to the aboriginal subsistence whaling in the United States. We will be listening with interest on the range of topics over the next few days and look forward to engaging with participants here on the issues of mutual concern.

Thank you



## **OPENING STATEMENT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION**

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.

## **OPENING STATEMENT FROM THE MAKIVVIK**

Mr. Chair, NAMMCO members, and other observers

Makivvik, on behalf of the Inuit of Nunavik, Northern Quebec, is pleased to be an observer to the 31<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of NAMMCO in Reykjavík. We would like to thank Reykjavík and Iceland for hosting this meeting.

Makivik views the proceedings of NAMMCO as an important forum for discussions on issues that pertain to the sustainable use of marine mammals that are essential to Nunavik Inuit food security, culture, and livelihood, within the context of comprehensive Canadian Land Claims Agreements.

Nunavimmiut have used seals, whales, and walrus for millennia to survive. The health of the ecosystem and the marine mammals that reside in it are intimately linked with the health of Inuit. Sound

management can only be achieved by using accurate data based on both traditional Inuit approaches as well as western science. Including the use of both science and Inuit Knowledge is essential for the stewardship of this vital resource.

Makivvik has over 46 years' experience in reconciling knowledges and approaches through research & monitoring and in developing collaboration with key partners to ensure our resources are safe and beneficial to our well-being. We will continue to advocate for better wildlife management plans and policies with the help of all stakeholders for the benefit of Nunavik Inuit.

Nakurmiik, thank you, merci. Tak fyrir

### **OPENING STATEMENT FROM THE IMWC WORLD CONSERVATION TRUST**

Over the last couple of years, the international community has seen the adoption of instruments that in one way or another will impact the sustainable use of marine and other resources. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, for instance, calls for the protection of 30% of the world's surface by 2030 — a target that is also part of the recently adopted Agreement on the Conservation of Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction. So, what can we expect? That more and more marine protected areas will be established that will prevent fishers or whalers from making use of the abundant marine resources that are there?

While some species are in dire need of protection, it is also clear that millions of humans are as well. And their protection cannot happen without the safeguarding of food security to which marine species, including whales, contribute. To this end, in December 2018, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas — also known as UNDROP — was adopted by the UN General Assembly. After decades of struggle, UNDROP combines the rights of Indigenous peoples with the rights of those depending directly on rural, coastal, or marine livelihoods. IWMC refers to these groups as the ARC (Aboriginal, Rural, and Coastal) communities.

Unfortunately, UNDROP has been neglected in conversation deliberations as not being universally approved. True, merely 121 countries have signed the declaration, but what is easily forgotten is the fact that the rights in it stem from legally binding documents that most countries of the world have ratified. Therefore, it is imperative to remind the international community that UNDROP is not a stand-alone document, but a testament of applied human rights in the context of small communities living with limited natural resources.

Later, this year, the International Whaling Commission will meet again. And again, it will discuss the issue of the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary. Against the backdrop of the Global Biodiversity Framework, the BBNJ and UNDROP, what would the establishment mean for whalers and fishers worldwide? Technically, it would mean that the largest swaths of the southern hemisphere would be whale sanctuaries. Even if the moratorium were to be lifted, special rules would apply here, affecting fisheries operations in some of the poorest countries in the world.

And what would be next? A North Atlantic Whale Sanctuary with drastic repercussions for millions of fishers and whalers? We therefore call upon all those state representatives present here at NAMMCO 31 to vote against the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary in the interest of coastal communities and their human rights.

Thank you.

## OPENING STATEMENT FROM KNAPK

KNAPK will hereby state the hunters' own observations and experiences in 2023 and 2024 for use at NAMMCO's annual meeting:

The maritime ecosystem

Climate change naturally has an impact on the maritime ecosystem in the Arctic, where the animals' food chain is affected, and the hunters in Greenland have noticed this. The hunters report an increased presence of narwhals and belugas throughout the coast of Greenland, to the extent that it has become a nuisance for fishing in these years. This has a negative effect on their earnings. The seriousness of the situation must be understood by the biologists, Naalakkersuisut and the EU as well as international organisations.

Belugas

The hunters notice that more and more belugas are coming along the west coast from north to south. There will be more observations from Sisimiut to South Greenland, where more belugas will even be observed around the southern tip. The situation in South Greenland is so bad that belugas become entangled in bottom nets in the cod fishery, thus harming the fishery.

More and more belugas are observed in East Greenland year after year, where in autumn 2023 an incredible number of belugas were observed in the village of Kuummiut in the Tasiilaq district, where belugas migrated in large groups from south to north all day. And therefore, the hunters want a fixed annual quota to be allocated to the hunters in East Greenland.

Narwhals

The population of narwhals is getting bigger and bigger year after year throughout West Greenland and East Greenland. There are so many narwhals that the animals are a major nuisance for fishing in North Greenland, and the presence of narwhals all year scares the halibut, where narwhals are even caught in halibut fishing lines. Thus, 5 catches with longlines were reported in 2023.

Narwhals are observed throughout the year throughout Greenland, although this has not been the case in the past. In the summer of 2023, a record number of narwhals were observed in the Qaanaaq district and the Upernavik district, and many sightings can also be seen in video recordings via YouTube by some citizens from the area.

Therefore, KNAPK demands from Naalakkersuisut that specific quotas for narwhals be re-allocated in the various locations. There is a need for a new redistribution of met for self-sufficiency.

Project on the establishment of a user knowledge centre

KNAPK is working on establishing a user knowledge centre in Nuuk in the association's head office. The project has been prepared in collaboration with various partners, and funds have been sought from various foundations.

It is necessary to gather knowledge, documentation, registration, dissemination, printing, recording (audio and video), interviews, etc. The work will be based on the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organization's manual for collecting data on traditional knowledge. The accumulated knowledge will be available to all agencies that have an interest in traditional knowledge, user knowledge and the like.

Thank you.

*Translations of KNAPK statement to Greenlandic and Danish can be found on the [website](#).*

## APPENDIX 5: THEME SESSION - SUMMARY OF THE INVITED SPEAKERS'S PRESENTATIONS

### Invited speaker: Dr Kathrine A. Ryeng - "Animal Welfare in Marine Mammal Hunting"

#### Summary

Dr Kathrine A. Ryeng gave a presentation on "Animal welfare in Marine Mammal Hunting". Marine mammal hunting most often takes place in uncontrolled conditions under challenging circumstances, a rough environment and moving targets. As for any method of slaughter, animal welfare in terms of protecting the animal from pain and suffering is a key issue for hunting. This implies avoiding suffering or minimising the duration of suffering such that the time to bring about unconsciousness is as short as possible. An unconscious animal is unable to experience pain and fear. From an animal welfare point of view, the time to loss of consciousness is more important than the time to death. In a hunting context, the welfare assessment should also include wider assessment of behaviour and stress prior to killing, i.e. opportunistic approach vs chasing.

The different killing strategies for slaughtered livestock and groups of hunted mammals were presented. The slaughter of livestock is commonly conducted using two interventions. First, the animal is stunned to induce a loss of consciousness. Second, the animal is bled to induce death. The induction of unconsciousness aims to ensure that the animal does not experience pain or fear during the slaughter process. Similarly, the expanding bullet target area in seals is the brain or upper neck. Bullet impact in this area induces instantaneous loss of consciousness and death. In terrestrial mammals, by contrast, the expanding bullet target area is the chest. Chest shooting induces a rapid death through fatal haemorrhage resulting in hypovolemic shock as the primary cause of death, but there is not an instantaneous loss of consciousness. Also in modern whaling, the explosive grenade target area is the chest. However, unlike an expanding bullet, the grenade is designed to detonate in the centre of the thorax. In addition to severe damage to vital organs in the chest, the detonation results in blast-induced neurotrauma resulting in immediate or very rapid loss of consciousness and death.

In her presentation, Dr Ryeng focused on the Norwegian pack-ice harp seal rifle hunt and modern whaling with explosive harpoon grenade. In NAMMCO member countries, minke, - fin, - humpback, - and bowhead whales are hunted using three types of whale cannons firing harpoons equipped with different versions of the explosive grenade "Whale Grenade-99". In Norway, only the minke whale is hunted.

Important prerequisites for the best animal welfare outcomes of seal hunting and modern whaling were highlighted. These included well maintained and prepared weapons and back-up weapons of suitable power for the target species. As recently proven in young harp seals, an explosively expanding bullet may improve the welfare outcomes of the hunt. Back-up weapons in the pack-ice seal hunt is the rifle and a second bullet and the hakapik. In the minke whale hunt, the back-up weapons are either the harpoon cannon and a second grenade, or, if the whale is attached to the harpoon line, a rifle of calibre .375 or .458 and round nosed, full metal jacket bullets. The rifle bullet target organ is the brain. In large whales, the back-up weapon is the harpoon cannon and a second grenade. Secondly, the shooter's attitude, skills and experience are of utmost importance. The shooter must consider factors such as wind- and weather conditions, ice conditions, bobbing movements of the vessel and ice floes, waves, movements of the seal or whale, shooting distance, shooting angle as well as being able to interpret signs of an effective or ineffective killing. Targeting adult harp seals, the shooting distance should not exceed 100 meters. Recommended shooting angle to the head of young harp seals and probably in any seal hunt, is obliquely from the front. Shots directly from the side may result in some of the worst welfare outcomes – namely snout shots. Shooting directly from the side should be performed with caution or avoided. In whaling, the shooting angle should be from a side position between 45° and 135° relative to the longitudinal axis of the animal. A wounded whale that needs to be reshot with a grenade should be shot as soon as it surfaces within shooting range regardless of shooting angle.

Robust welfare assessment of the hunt should be performed by independent observers, include sufficient number of shooting events as well as ante-mortem (before death) and post-mortem (after death) data to quantify 1) the duration of suffering from shooting to unconsciousness or death (Time To Death, TTD) and 2) the frequency of instantaneous unconsciousness or death (Instantaneous Death Rate, IDR), and frequencies of non-fatal wounding (terrestrial mammals) / struck-and-lost (marine mammals). Studies combining ante-mortem and post-mortem data collected by an independent observer to assess shooting methods, was first developed for minke whaling practices in Norway in the 1980s. It has since been applied to other marine- and terrestrial mammal hunts. For comparison, IDRs reported for minke whaling in Norway, fin whaling in Iceland and the Norwegian pack-ice rifle hunt on young harp seals were 82%, 84% and 84.2%, respectively. In recent years, combined ante- and post-mortem data have been utilised in a body of work on wildlife management in Australia. The IDRs reported for vehicle-based shooting of European rabbit, helicopter shooting of feral dromedary camels and feral horses, vehicle-based shooting of peri-urban kangaroos and rusa deer were 60%, 83%, 63%, 98% and 87%, respectively. In a Swedish slaughterhouse, processing on average 200 cattle daily, inadequate captive bolt stunning occurred in 12.5% of the cattle (IDR 87.5%).

**Invited speaker: Dr Snjólaug Árnadóttir - “Whaling and Animal Welfare under International Law”**

## Summary

Dr Snjólaug Árnadóttir gave a presentation on Whaling and Animal Welfare under International Law. Her presentation began with an overview of domestic law governing whaling in Iceland, and recent events leading to a decision to review the legislation. The Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries enacted a regulation in August 2022 to promote animal welfare by carrying out regular monitoring of animal welfare during whaling. The Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority issued a surveillance report in May 2023 and found that whaling in Iceland had not adhered to all relevant requirements. Consequently, another regulation was adopted to postpone whaling to 1 September 2023. This decision was appealed to the Ombudsman, who found that the regulation lacked sufficient legal basis under the authoritative provision in the whaling law as it leaned too heavily on animal welfare considerations. Shortly thereafter, another regulation was adopted to improve the framework for whaling of fin whales. Furthermore, a Working Group was appointed by the Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries in February 2024 to assess relevant administrative and international law with a view to updating the Icelandic whaling legislation.

Dr. Árnadóttir and other members of the working group are currently mapping out all sources of law relevant for the regulation of whaling and this includes international rules regarding animal welfare. There are three main legal approaches to animals under international law: species protection, animal welfare and animal rights. The first category is flourishing in international law with a number of international treaties addressing biodiversity and conservation of vulnerable species. The second category is underdeveloped in international law as animal welfare laws are primarily enacted at the domestic or European levels. The third category is not regulated at the international level and only a few States provide animals with rights in their domestic legislation.

Animal welfare is often regarded as an internal matter to be regulated by individual States. However, the migratory nature of whales clearly calls for an international approach. Another reason for the lack of regulation of animal welfare in relation to whaling is arguably the moratorium on commercial whaling; the rarity and diversity of whaling today is hindering progressive development of the law. Still, this does not mean that there is a legal vacuum when it comes to animal welfare in relation to whaling. Traditionally, in public international law, the lack of treaties on any given subject means that you look to other sources of law, ideally to customary international law. In areas of international law where there are very few active players, their actions become more impactful in carving out the path for customary international law. These are often referred to as the ‘elephants’ in this context of developing the law. The NAMMCO nations are unequivocally the ‘elephants’ in the field of whaling and may therefore, even if unknowingly, be shaping customary international law in this field. The diversity of whaling techniques may mean that no practice is sufficiently consistent and uniform to form the basis for customary international law. However, there are some indicators that procedural obligations relating to e.g. surveillance, reporting and training for shooters, might acquire that status.

**APPENDIX 6: AUDITED ACCOUNTS 2023**

<b>Income</b>	
Contributions	5,030,048
MINTAG fundings	151,177
Other project fundings	63,801
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>5,245,026</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	
Staff related costs	3,481,251
Internship	98,918
Staff travel and subsistence	195,204
Meetings	182,983
Rent of premises	277,103
Office supply	187,945
Communication & Outreach	120,106
Accounts & auditing	283,713
Observation scheme	237,477
Committee on Hunting Methods	164,750
Committee on Inspection and Observation	0
Scientific Committee	304,042
Other expenses	167,950
NASS	80,496
MINTAG	151,177
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>5,933,115</b>
<b>OPERATING RESULT</b>	- 688,089
Financial revenue (interest)	76,144
Financial costs	- 4,533
<b>RESULT TO RESERVE</b>	- <b>616,478</b>
<b>BALANCE</b>	
<b>Assets</b>	
Outstanding claims	424,999
Claim employee	-26,780
Bank deposits	6,477,912
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>6,876,131</b>
<b>Equity</b>	
General Reserve	1,527,992
Restricted Reserve	600,000
Result	- 616,477
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>1,511,515</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>	
Japanese Funds	501,029
MINTAG project	4,008,863
Other fundings	687,787
Creditors	77,462
Various liabilities	89,475
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>5,364,616</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>6,876,131</b>

**APPENDIX 7: ANTICIPATED RESULTS 2024, BUDGET 2025, DRAFT BUDGET 2026**

	Budget 2024 (CL30)	Anticipated 2024 results with 2023 results	Draft budget 2025 (CL30)	Budget 2025 (CL 31)	Draft budget 2026 (CL 31)
<b>Income // Contributions</b>					
Contributions Faroes	640,897	<b>640,897</b>	653,715	<b>653,715</b>	<b>666,789</b>
Contributions Greenland	640,897	<b>640,897</b>	653,715	<b>653,715</b>	<b>666,789</b>
Contributions Iceland	1,281,795	<b>1,281,795</b>	1,307,431	<b>1,307,431</b>	<b>1,333,580</b>
Contributions Norway	2,567,111	<b>2,567,111</b>	2,618,453	<b>2,618,453</b>	<b>2,670,822</b>
<b>Income // Contributions</b>	<b>5,130,700</b>	<b>5,130,700</b>	<b>5,233,314</b>	<b>5,233,314</b>	<b>5,337,980</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>					
Staff related costs	3,032,013	<b>3,086,834</b>	2,910,478	<b>3,281,736</b>	<b>3,306,210</b>
Internship	220,400	<b>189,300</b>	250,400	<b>196,500</b>	<b>219,600</b>
Staff travel and subsistence	270,000	<b>270,000</b>	200,000	<b>130,000</b>	<b>210,000</b>
Meetings	205,000	<b>200,000</b>	200,000	<b>230,000</b>	<b>205,000</b>
Office rent	334,969	<b>295,917</b>	351,717	<b>310,712</b>	<b>326,248</b>
Office supply	189,000	<b>156,300</b>	198,450	<b>159,426</b>	<b>162,615</b>
Communication and outreach	150,000	<b>75,000</b>	150,000	<b>75,000</b>	<b>75,000</b>
Accounts and auditing	210,000	<b>250,000</b>	220,500	<b>220,500</b>	<b>230,000</b>
Observation Scheme	0	<b>60,000</b>	100,000	<b>60,000</b>	<b>250,000</b>
Committee for Hunting Methods	200,000	<b>65,000</b>	200,000	<b>25,000</b>	<b>250,000</b>
Scientific Committee	222,000	<b>150,000</b>	244,000	<b>295,000</b>	<b>155,000</b>
WG User knowledge	40,000	<b>40,000</b>	40,000	<b>40,000</b>	<b>40,000</b>
Capacity building	40,000	<b>20,000</b>	40,000	<b>20,000</b>	<b>20,000</b>
Other expenses (incl. Recruitment)	50,000	<b>75,000</b>	250,000	<b>75,000</b>	<b>280,000</b>
NASS*	150,000	<b>150,000</b>	180,000	<b>180,000</b>	<b>150,000</b>
Project overheads		<b>-495,000</b>		<b>-25,200</b>	<b>-13,300</b>
MINTAG**	180,000	<b>180,000</b>	100,000	<b>100,000</b>	<b>100,000</b>
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>5,493,382</b>	<b>4,768,351</b>	<b>5,635,545</b>	<b>5,373,675</b>	<b>5,966,373</b>
<b>OPERATING RESULT</b>	<b>-362,682</b>	<b>362,349</b>	<b>-402,231</b>	<b>-140,361</b>	<b>-628,392</b>
<b>Total Reserve 01.01</b>	1,094,178	<b>1,253,211</b>	731,496	1,615,560	1,475,199
Transfer to/from general reserve	-362,682	362,349	-402,231	-140,361	-628,392
<b>New Total Reserve 31.12</b>	<b>731,496</b>	<b>1,615,560</b>	<b>329,265</b>	<b>1,475,199</b>	<b>846,807</b>



## APPENDIX 8: NEW PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

This appendix provides the proposals that the MCs have endorsed and forwarded as advice for conservation and management to the Parties.

### 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.*

### 2. MULTIPLE PARTIES

#### White-sided dolphin

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

### 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.*

### 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.*

## **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.*

## **6. NORWAY**

### **Harbour and grey seals**

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

## APPENDIX 9: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW RESEARCH

This appendix provides the recommendations for new research or data collection with implication for stock monitoring and management that the MCs have endorsed and forwarded to the Parties.

### 7. ALL PARTIES

#### 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.*

### 8. 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.*

## 9. 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 Kangerlussuaq 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.*

## 10. 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.*

## **11. 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.*

## APPENDIX 10: NEW OR MODIFIED REQUESTS FOR ADVICE FROM THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

### New Requests

The Council requested the Scientific Committee:

#### Beluga and narwhal

- *To prioritise investigating alternative survey methods and survey frequency for small stocks, with a focus on beluga and narwhal in East Greenland.*

#### Beluga

- *To prioritise the collection and analysis of data to improve the understanding of stock structure of beluga whales in East Greenland, which may allow future assessments for this species in this area.*

### Modified requests, as proposed by the MCs

The Council agreed to modify the text of four requests:

#### Bearded seal

Request R-2.7.1 was reformulated to ***“To complete its review and assessment of bearded seals when the necessary data become available, and collect and analyse existing information.”***

#### Ringed seal

Request R-2.3.3 was reformulated to ***“To complete its review and assessment of ringed seals when the necessary data become available, and collect and analyse existing information.”***

#### Harbour and grey seals

Request R-2.4.2 was reformulated to ***“To provide a new assessment of grey seal stocks in all NAMMCO areas.”***

#### Narwhal and beluga

Request R-3.4.11 was reformulated to ***“To update the assessment of both narwhal and beluga, when new data warrant such an exercise.”***

### Closed request

One requests for advice from the SC was considered satisfactorily answered and closed by the Council.

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

## APPENDIX 11: PRESS RELEASE

### **Commitment to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at NAMMCO's Annual Meeting**

At NAMMCO's 31st Annual Meeting held in Reykjavík, Iceland, from March 19th to 21st, the spotlight was on sustainable use of marine mammals, animal welfare, and proposals related to conservation and management. Member countries demonstrated a strong commitment to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14, emphasizing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources, as well as Goal 2, aiming for Zero Hunger.

During the meeting, 22 new proposals related to conservation and management, along with 44 research needs, were presented to member countries. The forthcoming report from the Management Committees will provide advice on pinniped and cetacean stocks.

The Council's opening session featured discussions on animal welfare issues associated with marine mammal hunting, drawing insights from both veterinary and legal perspectives. Additionally, the Council received the second instructional video for hunters, developed by the Committee on Hunting Methods.