

Opening Statement – NAMMCO 32nd Council Meeting

Chair, distinguished delegates,

IWMC is pleased to address this meeting of the NAMMCO Council, where the importance of sustainable use and science-based conservation remains paramount. Considering the rapidly changing global circumstances, it is imperative that we reaffirm the role of marine mammals in food security and the principles underpinning their sustainable harvest.

The geopolitical landscape has shifted dramatically in recent years, with significant consequences for global food security. The ongoing crises in the World have starkly demonstrated how fragile international food supply chains can be. It affects availability and affordability, particularly in regions already vulnerable to food insecurity. Against this backdrop, the sustainable harvest of marine resources, including whales and dolphins, remains an essential means of ensuring resilient, locally sourced nutrition for coastal and Indigenous communities.

Moreover, the targeted species within NAMMCO member states' waters are not endangered. They are harvested under strict quotas, based on the best available scientific knowledge and in accordance with robust monitoring and management systems. It is neither scientifically justified nor ethically consistent to consider marine mammals separately from other species that are sustainably used for food. The arbitrary distinction often made between cetaceans and other wild or domesticated food sources lacks an ecological or rational basis.

Crucially, hunting communities play a fundamental role in our understanding of marine ecosystems. Their knowledge accumulated over generations, provides invaluable insights into ecosystem dynamics, species distributions, and environmental changes—insights that often precede scientific discovery. In the face of global climate change, where marine ecosystems are experiencing rapid transformations, sidelining, or dismissing this knowledge would not only be a cultural loss but also a significant scientific and ecological setback. Sustainable hunting ensures that this expertise remains intact, fostering a deeper understanding of the shifting marine environment.

Scientific knowledge on whales continues to expand, enhancing our understanding of their ecological roles. It has been suggested that whales function as 'carbon storage masters' narrative increasingly used to argue against sustainable use. However, recent research,

including a 2023 study published in *Frontiers in Marine Science*, raises critical questions about these claims. A position confirmed in a document authored by Professor Joji Morishita, circulated at IWC69. Policy decisions must be guided by comprehensive, balanced research rather than selective interpretations designed to fit ideological positions.

NAMMCO has long championed a science-based, sustainable approach to marine mammal management—one that acknowledges the importance of food security, respects the knowledge of hunters, and integrates the latest scientific understanding. IWMC stands firmly in support of these principles, and we support the Council to continue defending the right to sustainable use, ensuring that policies remain rooted in facts, not sentiment, and in equity, not exclusion.

Thank you.

Eugene Lapointe
IWMC President
Former Secretary General of CITES (1982-1990)

Lausanne, 1 March 2025