



JOINT MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

25 March 2025

Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway

REPORT

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Please cite this report as:

NAMMCO-North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (2025). Report of the Joint meeting of the Management Committees, March 2025.

Available at <https://nammco.no/management-committees-reports/>

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Chair’s opening remarks	4
2.	Adoption of Agenda	4
3.	Environmental and Ecosystem perspective	4
3.1	Marine Mammal–Fishery Interactions.....	4
3.2	Multispecies approach to management and modelling	5
3.3	Environmental issues	6
4.	Update on members’ responses to proposals for Conservation and Management	7
5.	WG on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG)	7
6.	Election of Chairs for the Management Committees	8
7.	Any Other Business	8
8.	Close of meeting	8
9.	Adoption of Report	8
Appendix 1: Participant List		9
Appendix 2: Joint list of documents of the Management Committees		12
Appendix 3: Agenda		13

1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

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

The Chair informed that the joint meeting addresses issues of relevance to both the Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC) and the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), as well as anything pertaining to the work of the UIWG.

Calling attention to the relevant meeting documents (listed in Appendix 2) that had been made available online two weeks prior to the meeting, the Chair outlined the aims of this meeting, namely:

- Reviewing new information and responses to active requests for advice provided by the Scientific Committee during its last meeting in 2025 (SC/31).
- Determining whether any requests may be considered completed and closed or need to be renewed; making recommendations to Council regarding the status of requests, as needed.
- Considering both the new and reiterated proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research (that require national priority and support or concern a shared stock with a non-member country) made by SC/31; deciding whether to forward them to the Parties or not.
- Considering updates from the member countries on the proposals for conservation and management measures forwarded in previous years. The Parties were invited to provide these updates in writing prior to the meeting, but no responses were provided in 2025.
- Proposing to Council new requests to the Scientific Committee.
- Discussing the progress of the Working Group on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG).

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

A Draft Agenda was made available on the NAMMCO website on March 7. It was adopted without modification (Appendix 3).

3. ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

The Chair invited Sandra Granquist, Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee (SC), to present updates on the work of the SC during 2024 and responses to active requests pertaining to environmental and ecosystem topics.

3.1 MARINE MAMMAL–FISHERY INTERACTIONS

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-1.1.5 (1997, standing as of 2014)** *To periodically review and update available knowledge related to the understanding of interactions between marine mammals and commercially exploited marine resources.*
- **R-1.1.9 (2022, ongoing but not prioritised as of 2023)** *In addressing the standing request on ecosystem modelling and marine mammal fisheries interaction, to extend the focus to include all areas under NAMMCO jurisdiction.*
- **R-1.1.10 (2022, standing as of 2023)** *In light of the distributional shifts seen under T-NASS 2007 and later surveys, the SC should investigate dynamic changes in spatial distribution due to ecosystem changes and functional responses.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

The WG on By-catch (BYCWG) conducts the bulk of the SC's work in response to R-1.1.5, with the following Terms of Reference (ToR):

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

Marine mammal by-catch estimates that are available in NAMMCO countries, exist only for four fisheries; they have been reviewed and endorsed by the BYCWG and the SC. The BYCWG is therefore now focusing its efforts on the first ToR by developing an approach to quantifying the potential exposure to by-catch risk for different marine mammal species. The WG met online in May 2024, at which point it finalised and sent out a data call to NAMMCO Parties, requesting fishing effort data for the past five years. The Parties complied and, in October 2024, the BYCWG met to examine the submitted data. The SC approved of the method developed, which will involve combining spatio-temporally aggregated fishing effort with species density, to determine fishing gear types, areas, and seasons where risk of marine mammals becoming by-caught is greatest. Flagging high-risk areas will enable the WG to advise on allocating appropriate monitoring effort, while also highlighting those areas where no monitoring is necessary.

When discussing those fisheries where by-catch is monitored, the SC noted again the need for adequate species identification, which can be a difficult task for fishers when it comes to distinguishing grey and harbour seals, as well as harp seal pups.

Regarding R-1.1.10, the SC is looking forward to the results of the now completed NASS 2024 survey, which will provide further insights relevant to changes in the spatial distribution of cetacean species.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Proposals for Conservation and Management

All Parties

- Facilitate access of the BYCWG to marine mammal density estimates or abundances within the NAMMCO area, in a format suited to the type of risk mapping described in BYCWG report.

Recommendations for Research with implications for the Parties

Iceland and Norway

- *(reiterated from SC/28 and SC/30)* Improve knowledge on by-catches with data on species identification, genetics, and age, by collecting jaws from by-caught seals.

Comments from Parties

There were no comments from the Parties.

MCJ conclusion

The MCJ **endorsed** the proposal to all Parties and **renewed the endorsement** of the recommendation to Iceland and Norway. Both active requests remain standing, and no new requests were proposed to Council.

3.2 MULTISPECIES APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT AND MODELLING

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-1.2.1 (renewed 2019, ongoing but not prioritised as of 2023)** *To consider whether multispecies models for management purposes can be established for the North Atlantic ecosystems and whether such models could include the marine mammal compartment. If such models and the required data are not available, then identify the knowledge lacking for such an enterprise to be*

beneficial to proper scientific management and suggest scientific projects which would be required for obtaining this knowledge.

- **R-1.2.2 (1995, standing)** *In relation to the importance of the further development of multispecies approaches to the management of marine resources, to monitor stock levels and trends in stocks of all marine mammals in the North Atlantic.*
- **R-1.2.3 (2022, ongoing but not prioritised as of 2023)** *In addressing the standing requests on ecosystem modelling and marine mammal fisheries interaction, to extend the focus to include all areas under NAMMCO jurisdiction.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

Regarding R-1.2.1, various approaches have been applied over the years at an institutional level within different NAMMCO countries. The SC discussed the benefits of holding a dedicated workshop or special session around the SC/33 meeting, which could be extended beyond food web modelling to include ecological models for marine mammals.

In reference to R-1.2.2, the SC monitors and reviews information on stock levels for all marine mammal species within the NAMMCO remit. The results of NASS 2024 will not only provide current abundance estimates for different cetacean stocks but also add to the long-term dataset for trend analysis.

R-1.2.3 was not explicitly discussed at SC/31. This is because the default operation of the SC when answering requests includes all areas under NAMMCO jurisdiction, unless otherwise specified. It was proposed that this request be considered closed.

Comments from Parties

There were no comments from the Parties.

MCJ conclusion

The MCJ agreed that R-1.2.3 should be considered closed. The status of R-1.2.1 and R-1.2.2 remains unchanged.

3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

R-1.5.3 is primarily discussed under the Joint NAMMCO-JCNB WG, which has not met since 2021. As such, no updates were available for the SC to discuss this year.

Comments from Parties

Greenland previously expressed deep concern about the Canadian Baffinland Mary River mining project and its impact on marine mammals, as well as the mining project in Wolstenholme Fjord in North Greenland, Qaanaaq area, with their shipping and mining activity, with impact especially on the wintering stock of walrus in the area and the fall migration of beluga. Greenland repeated their concerns here, that human-caused disturbances might have more negative effects than direct removals.

Norway inquired why the JWG have not met recently, asking if the delay is on Canada's side. Greenland informed that they have consistently attempted to maintain contact across the JCNB (the Joint Commission for Narwhal and Beluga, established between Canada and Greenland). Greenland succeeded to get in contact with the new Canadian JCNB Commissioner this winter, and the communication will continue after this NAMMCO Annual Meeting. An online meeting of the JCNB is

expected this year, to discuss, among other topics, the outcomes and recommendations provided in the three last reports forwarded by the Joint NAMMCO-JCNB Scientific WG that have been received.

MCJ conclusion

R-1.5.3 remains standing. No new requests for advice were proposed to Council.

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

The Chair noted again that the Parties had not submitted updates on past Proposals and Recommendations. She urged members to submit updates to the Secretariat for 2025 as soon as possible and asked whether any changes should be made to the system by which progress is tracked. As none of the Parties offered any further comments, the Chair concluded that the system should remain in place, albeit with stronger effort for timely reporting.

5. WG ON ENHANCING USER INVOLVEMENT IN NAMMCO DECISION MAKING (UIWG)

Report of the UIWG

The Chair invited Deputy Secretary Naima El bani Altuna to present the report of the UIWG (NAMMCO/32/MC/07).

The UIWG held a fourth online meeting on June 25, 2024. During the meeting, the group did not make recommendations but discussed specific actions that could be proposed to take for enhancing user involvement in NAMMCO. Some of these actions included among other things to add a standing agenda item for discussing "User Knowledge" in all working groups, enhancing information sharing with users' organisations and users.

The Secretariat acknowledged some challenges the UIWG is experiencing, such as the lack of a clear mandate for integrating User Knowledge within the NAMMCO structure (whether user knowledge should be kept separate from the scientific discussions or incorporated as information therein), uncertainty about whom the advice of the UIWG should inform, a shortage of experts with experience in user involvement processes, the absence of a Chair and difficulty in appointing one, and misunderstandings regarding parallel initiatives.

The Secretariat requested guidance from the MCJ on how to proceed with the UIWG.

Comments from Parties

Greenland highlighted that they have supported the establishment of the UIWG and noted that they still supported the involvement of hunters in NAMMCO decision making processes. However, due to resource constraints, they are prioritising the forming of a new executive order on collection and use of user knowledge in Greenland. The executive order will enable the collection of hunter knowledge in a structured and organised way. In line with this, Greenland added that the UIWG should make use of data collected through other initiatives, such as that being developed by KNAPK, through a bottom-up approach. Greenland proposed the group could wait to make use of these tools when they are ready.

When asked about the legal infrastructure concerning traditional knowledge in other countries, Makivvik responded that it is mandatory to include Indigenous knowledge as well as science for management purposes, since 2008. They offered to share any insights and knowledge in further discussions of or about the UIWG.

Norway commented that the UIWG is one of NAMMCO's more recently established groups, which does not appear able to move from the discussion phase into meaningful action. Norway suggested that the course of action to be taken should be decided in the immediate future, otherwise the WG

may need to be paused or dismantled. Norway asked to revisit the ToRs of the UIWG, not to modify them, but to better understand the original intent behind the formation of the group. Following on from this, Iceland suggested pausing the WG's work, and tasking the Heads of Delegation with agreeing on a way forward in their upcoming meeting. The Faroe Islands and Norway supported the suggestion.

MCJ Conclusion

The MCJ **agreed** that the UIWG will pause its activities. The Heads of Delegation will discuss the optimal way forward for the UIWG and present their conclusions at the 33rd Annual Meeting (2026).

6. ELECTION OF CHAIRS FOR THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Gjelsvik noted that the terms of the current Management Committee Chairs will come to an end at the close of this Annual Meeting and, as such, new Chairs should be elected. Elections were held during the subsequent meetings of each Management Committee.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed.

8. CLOSE OF MEETING

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

9. ADOPTION OF REPORT

A draft of the report was adopted on 27 March 2025.

APPENDIX 1: Participant List

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APPENDIX 2: Joint list of documents of the Management Committees

Reference	Title	Agenda item
NAMMCO/32/08	Report of the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/32/MC/01	Joint list of Documents for the Management Committees	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/32/MC/02	Draft Annotated Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/32/MC/03	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/32/MC/04	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW)	MCSW
NAMMCO/32/MC/05	List of Proposals for Conservation and Management and Recommendations for Research generated by the MCs at their 2023 meeting, with Responses from the Parties	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/32/MC/06	List of Active Requests from the NAMMCO Council to the Scientific Committee, with Responses from the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/32/MC/07	Report of the Working Group on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO (UIWG)	MCJ
NAMMCO/32/MC/08	List of Participants	MCJ, MCC, MCSW

MC: Management Committee

MCJ: Joint Meeting of the Management Committees

MCC: Management Committee for Cetaceans

MCSW: Management Committee for Seals and Walruses

APPENDIX 3: Agenda

- 1. Chair's opening remarks**
- 2. Adoption of Agenda**
- 3. Environmental and Ecosystem Perspective**
 - 3.1 Marine Mammal-Fishery Interactions
 - 3.2 Multispecies Approach to Management and Modelling
 - 3.3 Environmental Issues
- 4. Update on members' responses to Proposals for Conservation and Management**
- 5. WG on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG)**
- 6. Election of Management Committee Chairs**
- 7. Any other business**
- 8. Close of meeting**
- 9. Adoption of report**