



MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUS

25 March 2025

Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway

REPORT

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56 1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

57 The Chair of the Meeting of the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), Guro Gjelsvik
58 (Norway), welcomed participants (listed in Appendix 1) to the meeting. She noted that NAMMCO
59 Deputy Secretary Naima El bani Altuna would act as main rapporteur, with support from the
60 Secretariat. The aims of this meeting were the same as those of the Joint meeting of the Management
61 Committees (MCJ), but focussing solely on topics related to seals and walrus.

62 The Chair noted that all the meeting documents (see Appendix 2) had been made available on the
63 NAMMCO website two weeks prior to the meeting.

64 2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

65 The Agenda (Appendix 3), which had been circulated online on March 7, was adopted without
66 modification.

67 3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEALS AND 68 WALRUS STOCKS

69 3.1. BEARDED SEAL

70 Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- 71 • **R-2.7.1 (rephrased 2024, ongoing)** to complete its review and assessment of bearded seals
72 when the necessary data become available and collect and analyse existing information.

73 Updates from the Scientific Committee

74 The Chair invited Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid to present the updates from the SC on bearded seals.

75 In response to R-2.7.1, the SC noted that, while a preliminary assessment in Greenland indicates that
76 the seal numbers are large, stable and that there are no immediate concerns, the lack of
77 comprehensive data prevents a full assessment. Therefore, the SC agreed that a full assessment be
78 conducted once all the necessary data become available. The date is to be confirmed but, according
79 to the proposed work plan, the Bearded Seal Working Group (BSWG) should take place in 2027.

80

81 Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

82 Recommendations involving shared stocks with non-NAMMCO countries

83 Canada

- 84 • Investigate bearded seal movements between West Greenland and Canada to determine if there
85 is a shared stock between the two areas.

86

87 Comments from Parties

88 The MCSW highlighted that the bearded seal data from previous marine mammal surveys conducted
89 in Melville Bay and the North Water Polynya, which can be of use to provide estimates of bearded seal
90 abundance, must be analysed before the next Bearded Seal WG (2027).

91 No other comments were made from the Parties.

92 MCSW Conclusion

93 The MCSW **agreed to forward** the recommendation of the SC for bearded seals to Canada and **strongly**
94 **encouraged** Greenlandic scientists to analyse previous marine mammal surveys in Melville Bay and the
95 North Water Polynya to provide estimates of bearded seal abundance.

96 The MCSW **agreed** to keep R-2.7.1 for bearded seals ongoing. No new requests were proposed.

97 3.2. RINGED SEAL

98 Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- 99 • **R-2.3.3 (rephrased 2024, ongoing)** to complete its review and assessment of ringed seals
100 when the necessary data become available and collect and analyse existing information.

101 Updates from the Scientific Committee

102 The Chair invited Rosing-Asvid to present the updates from the SC on ringed seals.

103 In response to R-2.3.3, the SC acknowledged the logistic difficulty of obtaining an abundance estimate
104 for ringed seals considering their extensive distribution. Despite this, aerial survey work will be carried
105 out in Greenland, in Ilulissat Icefjord, to study the Kangia ringed seal ecotype, and Svalbard, using
106 drones to count ringed seals in areas with and without hunts. The SC concluded therefore that a full
107 assessment cannot yet be conducted.

108 The SC highlighted that ringed seal is a species of strong concern, in light of rapid environmental
109 changes.

110 Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

111 Recommendations for research with Implications for the Parties

112 Greenland

- 113 • Determine whether there are isolated ringed seal stocks in different fjord systems.

114 Comments from Parties

115 Greenland noted that the Kangia fjord (near Ilulissat) ringed seals are seen as genetically and
116 geographically distinct from other stocks. From the management side, it would require revision of the
117 existing executive order on protection and hunting of seals from 2010 to allow for the separate
118 management of distinct stocks. As mentioned in 2024, Greenland will wait to do so until they have
119 received management advice after the recommended stock assessment and/or more research.

120 No other comments were made from the Parties.

121 MCSW Conclusion

122 The MCSW **endorsed** the recommendations of the SC for ringed seals.

123 The MCSW **agreed** to keep R-2.3.3 for ringed seals ongoing and no new requests were proposed
124 concerning ringed seals.

125 3.3. HARBOUR AND GREY SEALS

126 Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- 127 • **R-2.4.2 (rephrased 2024, ongoing)** to provide a new assessment of grey seal stocks in all NAMMCO
128 areas.
129 • **R-2.5.2 (renewed 2019, ongoing)** to conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour seals in
130 all NAMMCO areas as soon as feasible.

131 Updates from the Scientific Committee

132 The Chair invited Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid to present the updates from the SC on coastal seals.

133 In response to R-2.4.2 and R-2.5.2, the Coastal Seals Working Group (CSWG) is scheduled to meet in
134 2026, given the decline of coastal seal populations in some areas. Due to logistical and safety issues of
135 conventional surveys in several areas, the CSWG should discuss alternative methods to obtain
136 abundance estimates.

137 Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

138 **Recommendations for Research with Implications for the Parties**

139 Iceland and Norway

- 140 • *(reiterated from SC/28 and SC/30)* Improve knowledge on by-catches with data on species
141 identification, genetics, and age, by collecting jaws from by-caught seals [harbour and grey seals]

142 **Comments from Parties**

143 The MCSW noted that the same recommendation was also made by the SC under the subject of by-
144 catch. Consequently, the Parties agreed to seriously consider how to implement it.

145 Greenland highlighted that, as a general rule, for samples to be collected (i.e., jaws and other samples)
146 in a structured manner, necessary facilities (e.g., freezers) must be available. Therefore, the
147 implementation of such recommendations from the SC need to be coordinated with the relevant
148 institutions to make sure that the facilities are in place to ensure a successful sampling. Additionally,
149 Greenland informed that both harbour and grey seals are protected in Greenland by executive order
150 from 2010, and there are no plans to change this.

151 The Parties discussed the possibility of having a focused initiative for alternative survey methods to
152 obtain coastal seal abundance estimates. This initiative would take into account the needs and
153 specificities of each survey area. The MCSW formulated the following request and recommended that
154 the Council forward it to the SC:

- 155 • ***R-2.5.3 (2025) to investigate alternatives to traditional crewed aerial and boat-based surveys***
156 ***as methods for estimating coastal seal abundance.***

157 **MCSW Conclusion**

158 The MCSW **renewed the endorsement** of the recommendation for Iceland and Norway of the SC for
159 harbour and grey seals.

160 The MCSW **agreed** that both requests (R-2.4.2 and R-2.5.2) for harbour and grey seals remain ongoing.
161 The MCSW formulated and **forwarded** R-2.5.3 to the Council to be considered as a new request for
162 the SC.

163 **3.4. HARP AND HOODED SEALS**

164 **Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council**

- 165 • ***R-2.1.4 (renewed 2024, standing)*** to regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and
166 hooded seals as new information becomes available.
- 167 • ***R-2.1.9 (revised 2022, ongoing)*** to investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline of
168 Greenland Sea stock of hooded seals; and assess the status of the stock.
- 169 • ***R-2.1.10 (revised 2019, standing)*** to provide advice on the total allowable catches for the
170 management of harp seals.

171 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

172 The Chair invited Rosing-Asvid to present the updates from the SC on harp and hooded seals.

173 In response to R-2.1.9, the SC noted that during and after the Benchmark WS for Harp and Hooded
174 seals in 2023, the Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals (WGHARP) assessed a suite of
175 environmental variables to explain the apparent decline in the West Ice hooded seal stock but did not
176 find any of those drivers to contribute to their understanding of the reasons for the decline of this
177 stock. The SC noticed that R-2.1.9 is not part of the Terms of Reference of the WGHARP and
178 recommended that R-2.1.9 be added as a ToR for the next WGHARP meeting.

179 The SC/31 could not reply to R-2.1.4 and R-2.1.10, as the current population models are unfit for
 180 purpose. Due to this, the WGHARP planned for 2025 is postponed and the SC suggested holding a
 181 workshop to discuss modelling approaches for different seal species (planned for 2026).

182 **Comments from Parties**

183 The Chair of the SC mentioned a very recent study, that could not be discussed during the SC, which
 184 found a strong decrease of hooded seal pup production in the west Atlantic. Greenland expressed a
 185 concern about the decreasing population of west Atlantic hooded seals and the effects it may have on
 186 the harvesting in East Greenland. The MCSW formulated the following request and recommended that
 187 the Council forward it to the SC:

- 188 • *R-2.1.12: Investigate whether and to what extent the coastal hooded seal hunt in East*
 189 *Greenland will be affected if the decline in the Greenland Sea stock continues.*

190 It was noted that the request could be added as ToR for the next meeting of the WGHARP. No other
 191 comments were made from the Parties.

192 **MCSW Conclusion**

193 The MCSW **agreed** that R-2.1.4 and R-2.1.10 remained standing and that R-2.1.9 remains ongoing. The
 194 MCSW formulated R-2.1.12.

195 **3.5. WALRUS**

196 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

197 The Chair invited Rosing-Asvid to present the updates from the SC on walrus.

198 Given the significant time gap since the last walrus assessment in 2018, Greenland requires updated
 199 advice. The SC agreed that the Walrus WG take place in 2026 as planned, when new data from ongoing
 200 studies in Greenland and Svalbard is available. In Greenland a new survey will be conducted in 2026.
 201 This WG will require participation from Canada.

202 **Comments from Parties**

203 Greenland supported the SC's suggestion to postpone the assessment to 2026, acknowledging that the
 204 assessment should have been completed in 2022. Greenland has endorsed the advice from the 2018
 205 walrus assessment, and this will remain valid until a new assessment is carried out in 2026.

206 Greenland explained that if new advice should come into force in 2027, then they need to receive this
 207 new advice by April 2026. This is because the new advice has to be translated, the Government to be
 208 informed, a public hearing of minimum four weeks to be done, followed by the reception of comments
 209 to be evaluated with potential adjustments in the final document. The Government Cabinet needs to
 210 decide at the latest in November 2026 or before, to give the municipalities time to prepare
 211 management measures.

212 **MCSW Conclusion**

213 No new requests were proposed.

214 **4. UPDATE ON MEMBERS' RESPONSES TO PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION** 215 **AND MANAGEMENT**

216 As discussed in the MCJ, no updates on previously forwarded recommendations were submitted for
 217 2025. The Chair asked Parties to provide these to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

218 **5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

219 The MCSW elected Iceland, nominated by the Faroe Islands, as the Chair of the MCSW for the next
 220 period (2025-2026).

221 **6. CLOSE OF MEETING**

222 The Chair thanked the SC Chair, Rosing-Asvid, for his contributions and the participants for their
223 attendance. The Chair thanked the SC for its work on seal and walrus topics. The participants thanked
224 the Chair for his chairing and El bani Altuna for her reporting.

225 **7. ADOPTION OF REPORT**

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

227

228 **APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT LIST**

229

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APPENDIX 2: JOINT LIST OF DOCUMENTS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

	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. Conservation and Management Measures for Seals and Walrus Stocks

3.1 Bearded Seal

3.2 Ringed Seal

3.3 Harbour and Grey Seals

3.4 Harp and Hooded Seals

3.5 Walrus

4. Update on members' responses to Proposals for Conservation and Management

5. Any other business