



# MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR CETACEANS

*25 March 2025*

*Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway*

**REPORT**

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## 1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC), Malik Hansen (Greenland), welcomed participants (listed in Appendix 1) to the meeting. He noted that NAMMCO Deputy Secretary Maria Garagouni would act as main rapporteur, with support from the Secretariat. The aims of this meeting were the same as those of the Joint meeting of the Management Committees, but focussing solely on topics related to cetaceans.

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

## 2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

## 3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR CETACEAN STOCKS

Hansen invited Aqqalu Rosing-Asvid, Chair of the Scientific Committee, to present the SC's updates on active requests pertaining to narwhal and beluga. Following that, he gave the floor to Garagouni, to present the SC's work on other cetacean species.

### 3.1. NARWHAL AND BELUGA

#### Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-3.4.11 (2008, standing):** *To update the assessment of both narwhal and beluga, noting that new data warrant such an exercise.*
- **R-3.4.15 (2024, ongoing):** *To prioritise investigating alternative survey methods and survey frequency for small stocks, with a focus on beluga and narwhal in East Greenland.*
- **R-3.4.16 (2024, ongoing):** *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.*

#### Updates from the Scientific Committee

R-3.4.11 was not discussed at length by SC/31, as no new data were gathered during 2024 in East Greenland for either species, precluding possibility of a new assessment in the near future. The Joint NAMMCO-JCNB WG should provide updated information for West Greenland at their next meeting.

Progress on request R-3.4.15 will be difficult to achieve, as new technologies and survey methods are in very early stages of development. However, the SC discussed the possibility of a workshop to investigate this matter.

Regarding R-3.4.16, the SC cannot progress without first obtaining new samples from East Greenland belugas. None were provided to the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR) in 2024, as the necessary facilities were not in place in the remote communities. GINR had not yet provided the necessary sampling equipment.

#### Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

##### **Recommendations for Research with implications for the Parties**

##### Greenland

- *(reiterated from SC/30) Collect biological samples when available from narwhals in East Greenland, including areas north of Scoresby Sound, to explore genetic connectivity of different stocks.*

### Comments from Parties

Greenland noted the statements made by the SC regarding the collection of biological samples from narwhal and beluga. At the time the original recommendation was made to collect samples including testicles and ovaries, it was deemed too ambitious, as the necessary facilities were not in place. An amendment was made, namely, to focus on the collection of smaller samples. However, the facilities for hunters are still not in place. The Ministry of Fisheries and Hunting and the GINR have been in dialogue following SC/31 regarding this, and progress is being made (including, e.g., communication with wildlife officers and hunter's association who can assist with sampling).

Norway expressed hope that this dialogue quickly produces results, as there is concern that some belugas in East Greenland are from the (protected) Svalbard stock. Iceland and the Faroe Islands echoed Norway's comment, and hoped that the logistics surrounding this issue are resolved soon.

### MCC Conclusion

The MCC **renewed the endorsement** of the reiterated recommendation previously forwarded to Greenland in 2024. The status of all three requests remains unchanged. No new requests for advice on narwhal or beluga were proposed.

## 3.2. NORTHERN BOTTLENOSE WHALE

### Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- ***R-1.7.11 (renewed 2019, ongoing)*** *To develop estimates of abundance and trends as soon as possible once the [NASS 2015] survey has been completed.*

### Updates from the Scientific Committee

As progress on this request had stalled for some time following the NASS 2015 survey, the SC decided to await the results of the NASS 2024 survey, which will extend the dataset available for trend analysis. Norway has appointed a researcher to generate abundance estimates, which the SC will then incorporate in a more comprehensive review of northern bottlenose whale information.

### Comments from Parties

There were no comments from the Parties.

### MCC Conclusion

The request remains ongoing and no new requests for advice were proposed to Council relevant to northern bottlenose whales.

## 3.3. KILLER WHALE

### Updates from the Scientific Committee

A previously endorsed recommendation, to the effect that NAMMCO support the 5<sup>th</sup> International Orca Symposium (organised by CIRCE), was fulfilled this year. A workshop on North Atlantic killer whales was co-organised and chaired by Fernando Ugarte (Greenland, SC) and Filipa Samarra (Iceland). Garagouni acted as rapporteur for the workshop, and NAMMCO further supported the Symposium financially, offering a stipend for students researching killer whales in NAMMCO waters.

In light of the plethora of new information that would be presented at the Symposium, SC/31 discussed the possibility of conducting an assessment of killer whales in the near future. However, due to conflicting and potentially exaggerated or misreported catches of this species, more robust information on removals is needed.

## Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

### *Proposal for Conservation and Management*

#### Greenland

- Validate killer whale catch data every year to ensure accuracy of reporting.

#### Comments from Parties

There were no comments from the Parties.

#### MCC Conclusion

The MCC **endorsed** the Proposal to Greenland. No new requests pertaining to killer whales were put forward.

## 3.4. PILOT WHALE

### Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-3.8.6 (ongoing, 2011):** *To continue work to complete a full assessment of pilot whales in the North Atlantic and provide advice on the sustainability of catches, as soon as necessary further information becomes available, with particular emphasis on the Faroese area and East and West Greenland.*

#### Updates from the Scientific Committee

The WG on pilot whales (PWWG) is scheduled to convene in late 2025, to conduct an assessment of the species in the North Atlantic. To that end, the WG on Genetics was tasked with assessing existing information on stock structure and making recommendations for further necessary research prior to such an assessment. One detailed recommendation on “determining population structure at the scale of the North Atlantic” was echoed by the SC, which urged relevant scientists to complete this prior to the meeting of the PWWG. Additional information that is crucial for a robust assessment includes abundance estimates (NASS 2024 results), removal records, biological/life history parameters, and data on pollution and contaminants (recommendations made by the WG on harbour porpoise in 2022).

#### Comments from Parties

The Chair observed that the last pilot whale assessment was conducted in 1997 and acknowledged that the Faroe Islands are responsible for providing the bulk of the necessary information. The Faroe Islands gave an update on the status of data preparation, noting that the analysis of genetic samples is under way by a separate research team and thus out of their own hands. Data on life history is available, while the calculation of abundance estimates from NASS 2024 is a joint venture with Iceland and Norway. When asked how this analysis is progressing, the Faroe Islands informed that they are in discussions to appoint an appropriate person to conduct the identification of duplicate sightings, a critical part of the data processing. The Faroe Islands recognise that conducting a full assessment and obtaining management advice is important for the country.

The Chair noted that such an assessment cannot happen without the necessary data but stressed that information is also needed from the other NAMMCO countries. He asked that they respond to the Secretariat’s request for a status update at regular intervals, the deadline for the next update being April 20<sup>th</sup>.

#### MCC Conclusion

R-3.8.6 remains ongoing. No new requests regarding pilot whales were proposed.

### 3.5. WHITE-BEAKED, WHITE-SIDED, AND BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS

#### Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-3.9.6 (renewed 2019, pending):** *To carry out assessments of dolphin species for which there are removals.*

#### Updates from the Scientific Committee

White-sided dolphins were fully assessed in 2023 by the WG on dolphins, and the SC's advice on removals was endorsed by the MCC in 2024. White-beaked dolphins were only partially assessed at that time, using the Potential Biological Removal approach. The reason a full assessment could not be conducted was the lack of information on the stock structure and removal rates of animals hunted in Greenland, particularly West Greenland. The SC deemed that bottlenose dolphin observations (including sightings and removals) are too infrequent in NAMMCO waters to warrant an assessment.

#### Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

##### ***Proposal for Conservation and Management***

##### Greenland

- *(reiterated from SC/30)* 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.

#### Comments from Parties

Regarding the validation of removals, Greenland informed that a draft executive order has been prepared on small cetaceans besides narwhals and belugas, and the next step is to present it to the new Cabinet in order for it to be put in place.

#### MCC Conclusion

The MCC **renewed the endorsement** of the recommendation to Greenland. No new requests for advice on dolphins were proposed to Council.

### 3.6. HARBOUR PORPOISE

#### Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-3.10.1 (renewed 2019, ongoing):** *To perform an assessment of harbour porpoise throughout its range, which might include distribution and abundance, stock identity, biological parameters, ecological interaction, pollutants, removals, and sustainability of removals.*

#### Updates from the Scientific Committee

The WG on harbour porpoise (HPWG) is scheduled to meet in 2026 to conduct an assessment for all areas with sufficient data. At its last meeting, the HPWG had put forward recommendations to each Party regarding the research efforts needed to collect the required data for an assessment.

#### Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

##### ***Recommendations for Research with implications for the Parties***

##### All Parties

- Focus efforts on collecting the necessary data for a full assessment of harbour porpoise stocks in all NAMMCO areas.

#### Comments from Parties

The Chair asked the Parties for a status update regarding their progress on the HPWG's recommendations. Norway apologised for not providing updates for 2025, but informed that progress

is being made on several fronts and details will be submitted to the Secretariat in writing in the coming days. The Faroe Islands indicated that, although trying to update existing knowledge, they have a limited catch of harbour porpoises, and as such it is difficult to obtain the biological samples needed to examine, e.g., life history. They also noted that aerial surveys are unlikely to be used again for abundance estimates, and therefore alternative survey methods need to be investigated. Greenland has already produced an abundance estimate from the NASS 2024 aerial survey, which will be reviewed by the WG on Abundance Estimates in the Fall.

#### **MCC Conclusion**

The MCC **endorsed** the recommendation to all Parties, noting the importance of obtaining validated catch and comprehensive by-catch data for an assessment. R-3.10.1 remains ongoing. No new requests were proposed to Council.

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

As discussed in the Joint meeting of the Management Committee (MCJ), no updates on previously forwarded recommendations were submitted for 2025. The Chair asked Parties to provide these to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

### **5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The open MCJ agenda point on the election of a new MCC Chair was concluded during this meeting. Iceland nominated Norway for the upcoming chairship and Greenland seconded the motion. Norway graciously accepted the position, which they will hold until the close of the 34<sup>th</sup> NAMMCO Annual Meeting.

No further business was brought up.

### **6. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The Chair thanked the participants for their attendance and contributions, and the SC for its work on the subjects discussed. The participants commended the Chair and rapporteur for their work.

### **7. ADOPTION OF REPORT**

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



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## APPENDIX 2: JOINT LIST OF DOCUMENTS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Reference	Title	Agenda item
NAMMCO/32/08	Scientific Committee Report	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/32/MC/01	Joint list of Documents for the Management Committees	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/32/MCJ/02	Draft Annotated Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/32/MCC/03	Draft Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/32/MCSW/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, 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 WG on User Knowledge	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 Cetacean Stocks**

- 3.1 Narwhal and beluga
- 3.2 Northern bottlenose whale
- 3.3 Killer whale
- 3.4 Pilot whale
- 3.5 White-beaked, White-sided, and Bottlenose Dolphins
- 3.6 Harbour porpoise

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

**5. Any other business**

**6. Close of meeting**

**7. Adoption of report**