



MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUS

25 March 2025

Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway

REPORT

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1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the Meeting of the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), Guro Gjelsvik (Norway), welcomed participants (listed in Appendix 1) to the meeting. She noted that NAMMCO Deputy Secretary Naima El bani Altuna 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 (MCJ), but focussing solely on topics related to seals and walrus.

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 SEALS AND WALRUS STOCKS

3.1. BEARDED SEAL

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

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

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

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Recommendations involving shared stocks with non-NAMMCO countries

Canada

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

Comments from Parties

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

No other comments were made from the Parties.

MCSW Conclusion

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

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

3.2. RINGED SEAL

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

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

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

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

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Recommendations for Research with implications for the Parties

Greenland

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

Comments from Parties

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

No other comments were made from the Parties.

MCSW Conclusion

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

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

3.3. HARBOUR AND GREY SEALS

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

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

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

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

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 [harbour and grey] seals.

Comments from Parties

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

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

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

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

MCSW Conclusion

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

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

3.4. HARP AND HOODED SEALS

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

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

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

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

Comments from Parties

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

- **R-2.1.12 (2025, ongoing):** *To investigate whether and to what extent the coastal hooded seal hunt in East Greenland will be affected if the decline in the Greenland Sea and west Atlantic populations continues.*

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

MCSW Conclusion

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

3.5. WALRUS

Updates from the Scientific Committee

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

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

Comments from Parties

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

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

MCSW Conclusion

No new requests were proposed regarding walrus.

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

6. CLOSE OF MEETING

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

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

	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, 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

6. Close of meeting

7. Adoption of report