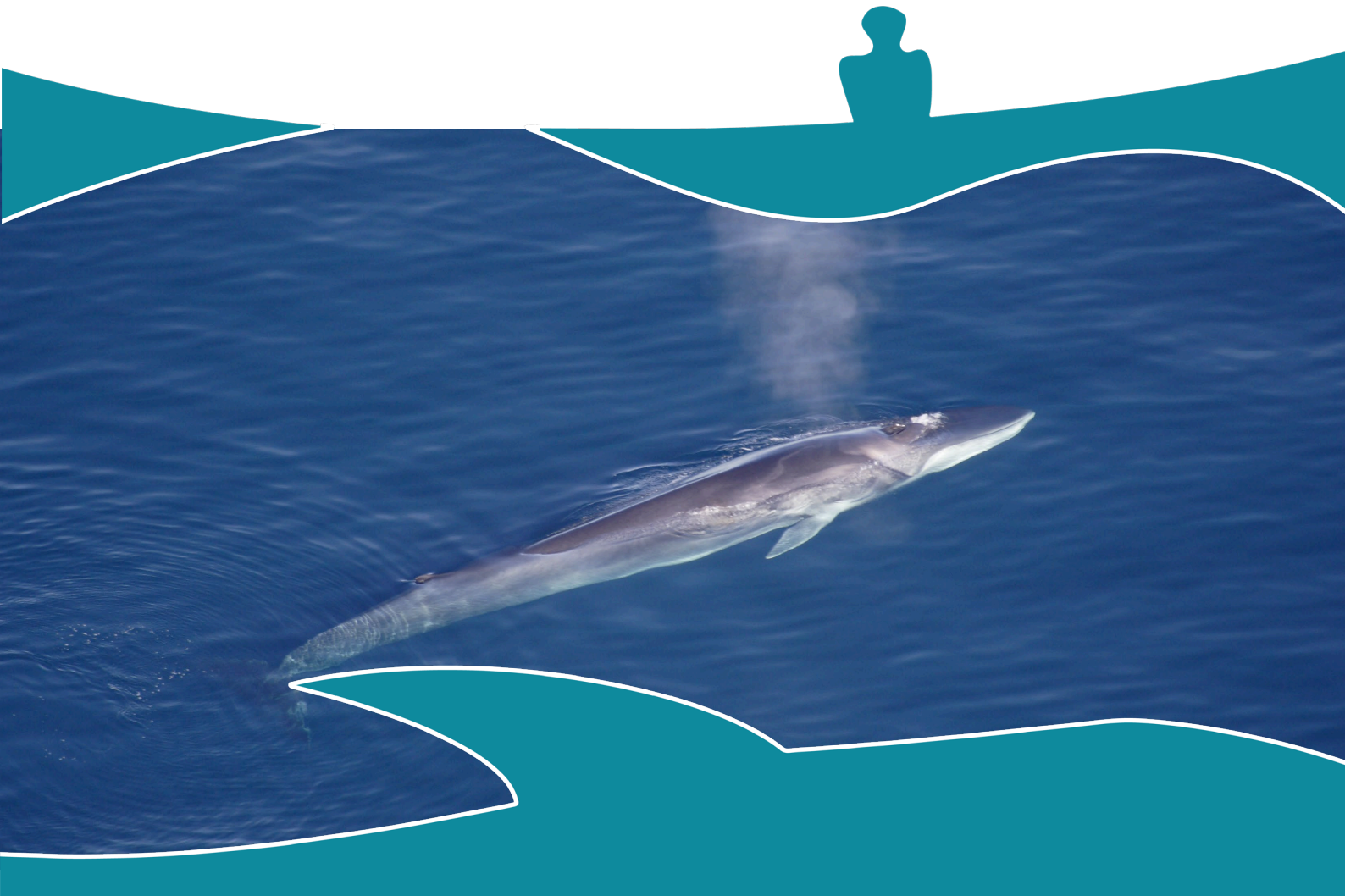
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR CETACEANS

24 March 2026

Hotel Hans Egede, Nuuk, Greenland

REPORT

Presented to the 33rd meeting of the Council as NAMMCO/33/FI01



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Cite this report as: NAMMCO (2026). *Report of the Management Committee for Cetaceans* (NAMMCO/MCC/2026-01). NAMMCO-North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission. Tromsø. Norway. XX pp. Link to the report

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1 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair of the Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC), Guro Gjelsvik (Norway), welcomed participants (see Appendix 1) to the meeting of the MCC. She noted that the structure would follow the same outline as in the MCSW but would focus on subjects relating to cetacean species. Gjelsvik also noted that, while the Scientific Committee (SC) discusses updates on all cetacean species in the NAMMCO area at its annual meeting, the MCC will only discuss species for which there are active requests, upcoming assessments, or recommendations from the SC.

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. NAMMCO Deputy Secretary Maria Garagouni was appointed primary rapporteur, with support from the Secretariat as needed.

2 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

A provisional agenda was circulated to Committee members on 6 February 2026, and the Draft Agenda was shared on the NAMMCO website well in advance of the meeting, according to the Rules of Procedure. The Agenda was adopted with no modifications.

3 CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR CETACEANS

3.1 NARWHAL AND BELUGA

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- ***R-3.4.11 (standing, rephrased 2024)*** *To update the assessment of both narwhal and beluga, when new data warrant such an exercise.*
- ***R-3.4.15 (ongoing, 2024)*** *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 (ongoing, 2024)*** *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

The Chair invited Anne Kirstine Frie, Vice Chair of the SC, to present updates from the SC on narwhal and beluga.

In response to R-3.4.11, the SC informed that new data is available to assess beluga and narwhal in West Greenland and the North water, and this will be taken up at a meeting of the Joint NAMMCO-JCNB Working Group later in 2026. No new information is available for East Greenland.

In response to R-3.4.15, there is a workshop on alternatives for classic cetacean survey methods planned for 2026 during which this topic can be explored.

Request R-3.4.16 cannot currently be completed, as there is no recognised stock of belugas in East Greenland. Current knowledge suggests that belugas in East Greenland are stragglers from other areas. No new samples are available to investigate this, as there have been no new catches in the past three years. However, ongoing genetic analysis of previous samples may shed further light on the origins of these vagrant animals.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Recommendations regarding removals

Greenland (narwhal)

- *(reiterated from SC/26 to SC/30)* Zero catches of narwhals in all three East Greenland Management Areas.

Greenland (beluga)

- *(reiterated from SC/30)* Zero catches of belugas in East Greenland.

Comments from Parties

Greenland stated that the lack of necessary infrastructure and equipment for storage (e.g., freezers) and transportation (small number of freight ships visiting settlements each year) of biological samples has proved particularly challenging in East Greenland, especially in the more remote settlements. Thus, even if the hunters were to start systematically collecting samples, they would not be able to store them appropriately for later analysis by scientists. The GINR (Greenland Institute for Natural Resources) is hoping to conduct more targeted sampling, such that any samples collected will not go to waste due to infrastructure issues. Greenland expressed hope that such issues will be resolved in the near future.

MCC Conclusion

The MCC **endorsed** the SC's recommendations regarding removals of narwhal and beluga in East Greenland.

No new requests were proposed, and the status of requests R-3.4.11, R-3.4.15, and R-3.4.16 remains unchanged.

3.2 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 Chair invited Frie to present updates from the SC on pilot whale.

In response to R-3.8.6, a full assessment of long-finned pilot whales was completed in 2025 by the Working Group on Pilot Whales (PWWG). The SC propose changing the status of this request to "standing", whereby the SC will determine the necessary frequency of assessments. A rewording of the request was suggested, as follows: *"To conduct a full assessment of pilot whales in the North Atlantic and provide advice on the sustainability of catches, as new information (data and analyses) render it pertinent"*.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Recommendations regarding removals

An annual total removal of 1570 pilot whales across the central and eastern North Atlantic allows the population to increase with 70% probability (the probability level applied in previous NAMMCO assessments). The current removals in all three hunts (average total of 956 animals in Faroe Islands, West and East Greenland, see below) are sustainable.

In relation to sustainability and to reduce the risk of local depletion, the WG recommends allocating future removals among the three hunting areas of West Greenland, East Greenland, and the Faroe Islands according to the average annual removals of the hunts during the last 10 years (i.e., from 2016 to 2025 for the Faroe Islands, and from 2015 to 2024 for Greenland). These average estimates are 679 for the Faroe Islands, 197 for West Greenland, and 80 for East Greenland (72 landed plus 10% struck and lost). With the overall summed annual removal being 956 animals, this implies a ratio

of 1570/956 = 1.6 between the estimated maximum sustainable removals and the current takes in each area.

Owing to the opportunistic nature of all three hunts, the advice is best implemented as a five-year limit that should not exceed 5*1.6*679 = 5432 removals over five years in the Faroe Islands, 5*1.6*197 = 1576 removals over five years in West Greenland, and 5*1.6*80 = 640 removals over five years in East Greenland (corresponding to 1576 and 576 landings for West and East Greenland, respectively). These recommendations assume no by-catch in the central and eastern North Atlantic. The advice should be reconsidered by the Scientific Committee, ideally within five years and no later than 10 years in the absence of new information.

Proposals for conservation and management

All Parties

- A survey to provide new information on abundance should be conducted within the next 10 years.
- More telemetry data should be collected from the Faroe Islands and additional areas across the North Atlantic to provide more representative geographical coverage. Tagging should aim to provide a more representative coverage of the whole year.

Faroe Islands

- Sampling and ageing of pilot whales should be conducted to provide a representative sample of the entire catch.

Greenland

- Undertake sampling for biological parameters from the drive hunts in West Greenland.
- Collect and analyse more genetic samples from West Greenland.
- Collect samples and conduct analyses to better inform stock definition in East and West Greenland (e.g., long-term telemetry, stable isotopes, contaminant levels).

Iceland

- Age existing tooth samples and collect data to inform biological parameters whenever possible.

Recommendations for Research with implications for the Parties

All Parties

- *(Reiterated from SC/31)* Initiate a dedicated genetic monitoring programme based on archival and newly collected samples from harvested groups in Greenland and the Faroe Islands, as well as in mass stranding events wherever they occur, to determine:
  i. family groupings and social structure,
  ii. putative population of origin,
  iii. the influence of removing entire family units during pilot whale hunts, for instance in terms of genetic diversity, inbreeding levels, mutation load, and standing genetic variation.
- Review and standardise the techniques used for ageing and obtaining reproductive parameters and determine whether there may be a common methodological bias in existing data.
- Collect information on body condition (e.g., blubber thickness) to monitor the effects of environmental changes.

Comments from Parties

Regarding the recommendation to sample and age representative samples of the catch, the Faroe Islands informed that they would strive to sample and age entire pods. They also noted that the annual

removals have been far below the recommended sustainable limit in recent years. Therefore, they are confident that there will be no issue in ensuring that total removals remain below the five-year catch limit recommended by the SC, as the catch statistics are closely monitored each year. It is expected that the Faroe Islands will approach the SC before the end of the five-year period, to ensure that the advice is up to date.

Greenland expressed some uncertainty regarding the struck and lost rates included in the recommendations. There are currently insufficient data to state conclusively whether the rates are high or low. A draft Executive Order is under final revision that would include better reporting of catches and struck and lost animals.

Greenland further commented that describing the hunt in West Greenland as a "drive hunt" may be misleading, as that hunt is not conducted in the same manner as the Faroese grindadráp. The following clarifications were given by PWWG members and local hunters:

"Hunting methods differ markedly between East and West Greenland. In East Greenland, pilot whales are known to occur in specific offshore areas 30–50 km from the coast, enabling directed hunting. Whales are taken individually in offshore waters, often with several dinghies shooting at the pods. This method likely results in considerable struck and lost animals, in addition to the whales brought to shore. In West Greenland, pilot whales are also primarily found offshore but are not subject to a targeted hunt. Instead, whales occasionally enter the deep-water troughs between the West Greenland banks. When detected by coastal residents, the whales can be driven into bays or shallow areas where they are shot. While individual animals may still be taken occasionally in West Greenland, the assumption can be made that struck and lost rates are negligible in this area."

The Faroe Islands informed that struck and lost rates had previously been investigated for their drive hunt and found to be negligible.

To avoid misinterpretation in future, it was suggested to remove the word "drive" from the recommendation pertaining to the hunt in West Greenland, and that a corrigendum could be added to the PWWG report, clarifying the distinction between the different hunts.

MCC Conclusion

The recommendations regarding removals were **endorsed** for the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The proposals for conservation and management were **endorsed** for all Parties, removing the word "drive" when mentioned in the West Greenland context. The reiterated recommendation for research pertaining to genetic investigations was noted.

The MCC **agreed** that the status of R-3.8.6 should be changed to standing, rephrasing the request as: *"To conduct a full assessment of pilot whales in the North Atlantic and provide advice on the sustainability of catches, as new information (data and analyses) render it pertinent"*.

3.3 DOLPHINS

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- ***R-3.9.6 (ongoing, 2019)*** *To carry out assessments of dolphin species undergoing removals in the North Atlantic.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

The Chair invited Frie to present updates from the SC regarding dolphins.

Frie explained that the SC's ability to fulfil R-3.9.6 is species-specific. While a full assessment of white-sided dolphins was completed in 2023, the request cannot be answered for white-beaked dolphins until more information on struck and lost rates and stock structure is available, for West Greenland in particular. The SC will revisit information on white-beaked dolphins at its next meeting, as results of ongoing genetic analysis are expected by then. For bottlenose dolphins, meanwhile, there are currently not enough records in the NAMMCO area on which to base an assessment.

Comments from Parties

Greenland informed that a new draft Executive Order is pending, whereby catch reporting for small cetaceans, including dolphins, would be more thorough; this should improve information on struck and lost data.

MCC Conclusion

The MCC **agreed** to split R-3.9.6 into standing species-specific requests that can be responded to individually. Following on from the MCJ discussion, the phrase "when data allow" was also added. The proposed requests are as follows:

- *R-3.9.7: To carry out assessments of white-sided dolphins in the North Atlantic when data allow.*
- *R-3.9.8: To carry out assessments of white-beaked dolphins in the North Atlantic when data allow.*
- *R-3.9.9: To carry out assessments of bottlenose dolphins in the North Atlantic when data allow.*

3.4 HARBOUR PORPOISE

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- ***R-3.10.1 (ongoing, 2019)*** *To perform a comprehensive assessment of the species throughout its range.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

The Chair invited Frie to present updates from the SC regarding harbour porpoise.

A meeting of the Harbour Porpoise Working Group (HPWG) is scheduled to be held in 2026, where an assessment will be conducted, including any new survey data and catch and by-catch statistics that have become available since the previous meeting in 2018.

MCC Conclusion

The Chair of the MCC reminded the Parties to facilitate the preparation of data and working documents well in advance of the HPWG meeting, to allow for a comprehensive assessment.

Request R-3.10.1 remains ongoing, and no new requests were proposed concerning harbour porpoise.

3.5 COMMON MINKE WHALE

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

There were no active requests for minke whale in 2025; however, Iceland required an updated assessment and estimation of sustainable catch limits for minke whales in Management Area CIC (Central Atlantic, Iceland).

Updates from the Scientific Committee

The Chair invited Frie to present updates from the SC regarding minke whale.

A meeting of the Working Group on Large Whale Assessments (LWAWG) was held in January 2026. A preliminary assessment of minke whales was conducted, including updated catch data and the abundance estimates from previous NASS (North Atlantic Sightings Surveys). Due to delays in endorsing the abundance estimates from NASS 2024, these were not included in the assessment models. However, once these are finalised and approved by the Abundance Estimates Working Group (AEWG), the LWAWG will revise the assessment models and provide updated recommendations regarding removals accordingly.

Frie emphasised a proposal that would enable the placement of cetacean observers on board fishery survey vessels on an annual basis. She highlighted that this would allow more frequent insights into

cetacean numbers and distribution shifts, whereas the dedicated cetacean surveys take place several years apart and cannot provide as much detailed information. Another benefit to using fishery survey vessels as platforms of opportunity is the fact that they collect a considerable amount of environmental data, including prey distribution, which could be incorporated into models of cetacean abundance and habitat use and directly inform our understanding of their distribution. Desportes added that annual surveys would create an available pool of trained cetacean observers who are familiar with survey protocols and do not need to be trained from scratch every few years.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Recommendations regarding removals

The recommended catch limits for 2026 within the Small Area CIC are 134 whales (tuning level 0.6) or 86 whales (tuning level 0.72). These are recommended as interim catch limits until the NASS 2024 abundance estimates are finalised and incorporated into a full recalculation. In the absence of updated advice, the current advice can continue to be extended following the 20% phase-out per year.

Proposals for conservation and management

- That NAMMCO approaches the IWC with a view to holding a joint workshop on common minke whale and fin whale population structure and movements in 2028. An online scoping workshop should be held in 2026 to discusses available data, analyses, and a workplan to ensure that the necessary information is available for the 2028 joint workshop.
- The analyses of existing and new material with respect to age, sex, reproductive status, and health should be undertaken by 2028, for both minke and fin whales.
- Implement systematic data collection and reporting schemes to improve reliability of data on by-catches and vessel strikes.
- Prioritise the allocation of funds in support of coordinated efforts to place cetacean observers on fishery vessels on an annual basis.

Comments from Parties

Iceland inquired what the timeline would be for the provision of updated recommendations. Garagouni informed that the aim is to complete the analysis and review of abundance estimates by mid-April, and that the LWAWG could convene immediately thereafter to update their recommendations (depending on the availability of WG members in the coming weeks). In that report, further clarifications will also be given regarding the period for which the removal advice is valid (i.e., a six-year block). Following this meeting, the SC will convene by correspondence to endorse the recommendations of the LWAWG.

Regarding the wording of the recommendation for removals, Iceland sought clarification on the terminology used. It was noted that the use of the phrase “current advice” could lead to misunderstanding, and therefore proposed rewording the recommendation to “In the absence of updated advice, ~~current advice~~ this interim advice can continue to be extended following the 20% phase-out per year”.

Greenland informed that a digital catch reporting system, which has already been implemented for caribou and muskox, will be expanded to include large whales, as well as small cetaceans that will be included in a quota-system, and walrus. This is an exciting development, as it will allow catch data to be gathered much faster than with the current system (as already seen with the terrestrial hunts).

MCC Conclusion

The MCC **endorsed** the interim recommendations regarding removals, and will forward the recommendation, as rephrased during the meeting, as advice to Iceland. The proposals for

conservation and management were also **endorsed**. No new requests were put forward concerning minke whales.

3.6 FIN WHALE

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

There were no active requests for fin whale in 2025; however, Iceland required an updated assessment and estimation of sustainable catch limits for fin whales in Management Areas of interest.

Updates from the Scientific Committee

The Chair invited Frie to present updates from the SC regarding fin whale.

As for minke whales, fin whales were assessed during the meeting of the Working Group on Large Whale Assessments (LWAWG) in January 2026. A preliminary assessment of fin whales was conducted, including updated catch data and the abundance estimates from previous NASS (North Atlantic Sightings Surveys). Due to delays in endorsing the abundance estimates from NASS 2024, these were not included in the assessment models. However, once these are finalised and approved by the Abundance Estimates Working Group (AEWG), the LWAWG will revise the assessment models and provide updated recommendations regarding removals accordingly.

Recommendations from the Scientific Committee

Recommendations regarding removals

In the absence of updated advice, the current advice can continue to be extended following the 20% phase-out per year.

Both V3 and the sum of V7-WI and V7-EI/F yielded the same total catches:

- V3 catch limits 150 (0.6 tuning); 90 (0.72 tuning)
- V7 catch limits WI 116 EI/F 34 (0.6 tuning); WI 70 EI/F 21 (0.72 tuning).

The SC recommends either of these interim catch limits for 2026 until the NASS 2024 abundance estimates are finalised and incorporated into a full recalculation.

Proposals for conservation and management

The proposals for conservation and management for minke whales also apply to fin whales, as noted in the previous section.

Comments from Parties

Iceland reiterated their earlier comments about minke whales, regarding the timeline for updated advice on fin whales, and clarifications regarding the duration of the advice's validity. It was confirmed that the LWAWG report (as for minke whales) will explicitly state the duration of the advice period. Iceland also requested confirmation that the reference to "current advice" referred to the presented interim recommendations as with the minke whales, in which case the wording should be updated in the same manner. A further clarification was requested regarding the hypotheses around stock structure and the calculation of catch limits accordingly. Specifically, Iceland inquired whether the approach of the LWAWG differed from previous assessments. Frie clarified that the process and assumptions were the same, as laid out by the IWC *Implementation Review.* There are currently a number of "variant" hypotheses concerning the delineation of stocks and sub-stocks, as well as the location of catches, of fin whales in the North Atlantic, all of which are considered valid until new information is available. At the previous assessment, Variant 7 was selected as the most appropriate for advice to Iceland. Based on the 2026 assessment, the SC considers that Variants 3 and 7 are equally suitable, as they result in practically identical recommendations for total catch limits. As this topic is somewhat convoluted, it was asked that the future report of the LWAWG contain more detailed context and clarifications surrounding the management areas to which the advice pertains.

MCC Conclusion

The MCC **endorsed** the interim recommendations regarding removals, and will forward the recommendation, as rephrased during the meeting, as advice to Iceland. The proposals for conservation and management were also **endorsed**. No new requests were put forward concerning fin whales.

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

Prior to the meeting of the MCC, each Party had shared updates on individual proposals and recommendations made by the SC and forwarded at previous annual meetings. These were presented in document NAMMCO/33/MC/05. It was noted that several recommendations could be considered completed, but no other comments were made.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was brought forward by the Parties.

6 CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chair thanked the participants for their attendance and contributions to a fruitful discussion. The participants thanked the Chair for steering the meeting and Garagouni for rapporteuring.

7 ADOPTION OF REPORT

The report was adopted on 26 March 2026.

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(Name of participants appear in alphabetical order of their first name)

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Document number	Title	Agenda item
NAMMCO/33/08	Report of the Scientific Committee	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/33/MC/01	Joint List of Documents for the Management Committees	MCJ, MCC, MCSW
NAMMCO/33/MC/02	Annotated Agenda Joint Meeting of the Management Committees (MCJ)	MCJ
NAMMCO/33/MC/03	Annotated Agenda Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC)	MCC
NAMMCO/33/MC/04	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 previous meetings, 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	List of Participants	MCJ, MCC, MCSW

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APPENDIX 3: AGENDA

1. **Chair's Opening Remarks**
2. **Adoption of Agenda**
3. **Conservation and management measures for cetaceans**
   - 3.1. Narwhal and beluga
   - 3.2. Pilot whale
   - 3.3. Dolphins
   - 3.4. Harbour Porpoise
   - 3.5. Common minke whale
   - 3.6. Fin whale
4. **Requests for Stock assessment**
   - 4.1. Wording of "Stalled" Requests
   - 4.2. Timing and procedure for routine assessments
5. **Update on members' responses to proposals for conservation and management**
6. **Any Other Business**