

NAMMCO



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUS

24 March 2026

Hotel Hans Egede, Nuuk, Greenland

REPORT

Presented to the 33rd meeting of the Council as NAMMCO/33/FI02



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Abbreviations used in the report:

Coastal seals: Harbour and grey seals
 CSWG: Coastal Seal Working Group
 GINR: Greenland Institute of Natural Resources
 IMR: Institute of Marine Research (Norway)
 MCC: Management Committee for Cetaceans
 MCJ: Joint Management Committee
 MCSW: Management Committee on Seal and Walrus
 R-: Request
 SC: Scientific Committee
 WG: Working Group

1 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

2 The Chair of the Meeting of the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), Jóhann
3 Ásmundsson (Iceland), welcomed participants (listed in Appendix 1) to the meeting. Ásmundsson
4 noted that NAMMCO Deputy Secretary Naima El bani Altuna would act as main rapporteur, with
5 support from the Secretariat. The aims of this meeting were the same as those of the Joint meeting of
6 the Management Committees (MCJ), but focussing solely on topics related to seals and walrus.

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

9 2 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

10 The agenda (Appendix 3), which had been circulated online on 6 March 2026, was adopted without
11 modification.

12 3 CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEAL AND WALRUS 13 STOCKS

14 3.1 BEARDED SEAL

15 **Active Request to the Scientific Committee from the Council**

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

18 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

19 The Chair invited Sandra Granquist, Chair of the SC, to present the updates from the SC on bearded
20 seals.

21 In response to R-2.7.1, the SC agreed to revisit the status of knowledge on bearded seals in 2027, when
22 all the survey data from Greenland will have been analysed. Greenland will collect data on bearded
23 seals when they are conducting the walrus survey in 2026.

24

25 **Comments from Parties**

26 No comments were made from the Parties.

27 **MCSW Conclusion**

28 The MCSW took note of the SC's plan. No new requests were proposed, and the MCSW **agreed** to keep
29 the status of request R-2.7.1 unchanged.

30 3.2 RINGED SEAL

31 **Active Request to the Scientific Committee from the Council**

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

34 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

35 The Chair invited Granquist to present the updates from the SC on ringed seals.

36 In response to R-2.3.3, the SC noted that a full assessment of ringed seals cannot yet be conducted.
37 However, the SC agreed to conduct a formal assessment of ringed seals in Kangia fjord in West
38 Greenland at SC/33, given the uniqueness of this group and the urgency of this matter. This assessment

39 will be held during a dedicated session, with all necessary information prepared by Greenland in
 40 advance. The SC also highlighted the importance of progressing with the recommendation reiterated
 41 from SC/31, namely to determine whether there are isolated ringed seal stocks in other fjord systems
 42 besides Kangia fjord.

43

44 **Recommendations from the Scientific Committee**

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

Greenland

- *(reiterated from SC/31)* Determine whether there are isolated ringed seal stocks in different fjord systems.

46 **Comments from Parties**

47 Greenland noted that they look forward to receiving more information on the ongoing ringed seal
 48 surveys in Kangia fjord being conducted by the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR).
 49 Greenland also highlighted that the existence of a different type of seal was first recognised by local
 50 communities and later confirmed by scientists.

51 Furthermore, Greenland informed the meeting that, following the SC's recommendation, research in
 52 other isolated fjords as informed will begin; however, this work remains financially challenging because
 53 funding has to be in place.

54 **MCSW Conclusion**

55 The MCSW **renewed the endorsement** of the recommendation of the SC for ringed seals.

56 The MCSW **agreed** that R-2.3.3 for ringed seals should remain ongoing. No new requests were
 57 proposed concerning ringed seals.

58 **3.3 HARBOUR AND GREY SEALS**

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

- 60 • **R-2.4.2 (Rephrased 2024, ongoing)** To provide a new assessment of grey seal stocks in all
 61 NAMMCO areas.
- 62 • **R-2.5.2 (Renewed 2019, ongoing)** To conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour
 63 seals in all NAMMCO areas as soon as feasible.
- 64 • **R-2.5.3 (2025, ongoing)** To investigate alternatives to traditional crewed aerial and boat-based
 65 surveys as methods for estimating coastal seal abundance.

66 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

67 The Chair invited Granquist to present the updates from the SC on harbour and grey seals.

68 In response to R-2.4.2 and R-2.5.2, the SC agreed that postponing the Coastal Seals Working Group
 69 (CSWG) meeting by an additional year, to 2027, would be acceptable. In the interim, the SC agreed
 70 that a short online meeting should be held in the autumn of 2026 to provide a status update and to
 71 ensure clarity regarding the requirements and preparatory work needed for the 2027 meeting.

72 Regarding R-2.5.3, the SC agreed that this request should be incorporated into the Terms of Reference
 73 of the CSWG or, alternatively, addressed by organising a back-to-back workshop with the Working
 74 Group (WG). This workshop could have the more focused objective of reviewing alternative survey
 75 methods for coastal seals. The SC agreed that this matter should be revisited during the CSWG online
 76 meeting in autumn 2026.

77 **Recommendations from the Scientific Committee**

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

Iceland and Norway

- *(reiterated from SC/28, SC/30, and SC/31)* Improve knowledge on by-catches with data on species, genetics, and age, by collecting jaws from by-caught seals.

79

80 **Comments from Parties**

81 The Faroe Islands informed the meeting that genetic analyses indicate the presence of a distinct
82 Faroese stock of grey seals. Although there had initially been concern that removals might pose a
83 threat to this population, that concern led to increased research on the species, and current findings
84 suggest that the population is viable. Targeted removals around aquaculture farms stopped in 2021,
85 and there is currently no harvest. A new survey is planned for summer 2026 and this will be presented
86 in the upcoming CSWG.

87 The Chair asked Iceland and Norway for updates regarding the recommendation addressed to them
88 and reiterated by SC/32.

89 The Vice-Chair of the SC, Anne Kirstine Frie, noted that there is general agreement to implement the
90 recommendation in Norway. However, the Institute of Marine Research (IMR) currently lacks the
91 necessary funding, particularly for seal related work. Norway will nonetheless explore the possibility
92 of securing funding and will work with the IMR to determine how to move forward.

93 Iceland did not have any new information to report, although they reiterated the importance of the
94 SC/32 recommendation concerning data collection to address the issue of misidentification in by-
95 catch. They remain in the process of developing an implementation plan and hope to be able to report
96 on progress soon.

97 The Chair concluded by noting that it is encouraging to see ongoing efforts and expressed hope that
98 results will be achieved sooner rather than later, despite the challenges involved.

99 **MCSW Conclusion**

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

102 The MCSW **agreed** to keep R-2.4.2, R-2.5.2, and R-2.5.3 for coastal seals ongoing. No new requests
103 were proposed for these species.

104 **3.4 HARP AND HOODED SEALS**105 **Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council**

- 106 • **R-2.1.4 (2024, standing)** *To regularly update the stock status of North Atlantic harp and*
107 *hooded seals as new information becomes available.*
- 108 • **R-2.1.9 (2022, ongoing)** *To investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline of Greenland*
109 *Sea stock of hooded seals and assess the status of the stock.*
- 110 • **R-2.1.10rev (2019, standing)** *To provide advice on the total allowable catches for the*
111 *management of harp seals.*
- 112 • **R-2.1.12 (2025, ongoing)** *Investigate whether and to what extent the coastal hooded seal hunt*
113 *in East Greenland will be affected if the decline in the Greenland Sea and west Atlantic*
114 *populations continues.*

115 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

116 The Chair invited Granquist to present the updates from the SC on harp and hooded seals.

117 Requests R-2.1.4, R-2.1.9, R-2.1.10, and R-2.1.12 could not be addressed by SC/32, as the current
 118 population models are not fit for purpose and therefore do not allow a reliable assessment to be
 119 conducted.

120 In the absence of a planned WGHARP meeting in 2026, the SC agreed that to provide a preliminary
 121 reply to R-2.1.12, Greenland will compile the relevant information on the potential impacts of the
 122 decline in hooded seals on the hooded seal hunt, in order to support a response to this request. This
 123 information will be submitted to SC/33 in 2027.

124 **Comments from Parties**

125 Greenland indicated that, from a management perspective, the level of hooded seal harvest in East
 126 Greenland seems very low. The harvest levels have not resulted in any detectable negative impact on
 127 the hooded seal population, given that they are minimal in scale and hunted exclusively for subsistence
 128 purposes rather than commercial use.

129 **MCSW Conclusion**

130 The MCSW **agreed** to keep R-2.1.9 and R-2.1.12 for harp and hooded seals ongoing. No new requests
 131 were proposed for these species.

132 **3.5 WALRUS**

133 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

134 The Chair invited Granquist to present the updates from the SC on walrus.

135 Given the significant time gap since the most recent walrus assessment in 2018, Greenland indicated
 136 a need for updated scientific advice at Council 32 (2025). The SC acknowledged this need but agreed
 137 that it would be most appropriate to postpone the work until late 2027, in anticipation of new survey
 138 data expected to become available in 2026. Accordingly, the SC decided to postpone convening the
 139 Walrus WG until late 2027.

140 **Recommendations from the Scientific Committee**

141 ***Recommendations for removals***

Greenland

- Until a new assessment is conducted, the advice on removals from 2018 should continue to be followed.

142 **Comments from Parties**

143 Greenland reported that the Greenlandic Government continues to adhere to the existing scientific
 144 advice for both West Greenland and East Greenland and welcomes the new recommendation that will
 145 follow the 2027 Walrus WG.

146 Greenland also noted a decline in reported catches in the Qaanaaq area since 2015. Consultations with
 147 hunters suggest that this decline is primarily driven by changing ice conditions. Shorter periods of
 148 stable ice cover, together with the ice edge now forming closer to the settlement, limit hunters' ability
 149 to reach walrus using traditional hunting methods. These conditions make sea travel more difficult,
 150 particularly given that the preferred hunting method, using qajaqs and hand harpoons and rifles near
 151 the ice edge, relies on predictable and stable ice. As a result, the decrease in catches reflects reduced
 152 access to walrus, rather than a reduction in walrus abundance. Similar feedback was obtained from
 153 hunters in Ittoqqortoormiit. They report that current ice conditions are increasingly challenging, noting
 154 that although walrus remain visible from the settlement, the worsening sea ice conditions prevent
 155 them from safely reaching the animals.

156 **MCSW Conclusion**

157 No new requests were formulated for walrus.

158 **4 UPDATE ON MEMBERS' RESPONSES TO PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION**
159 **AND MANAGEMENT**

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

164 **5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

165 No other business was discussed.

166 **6 CLOSE OF MEETING**

167 The Chair thanked the participants for their attendance and contributions. The participants thanked
168 the Chair for steering the meeting and El bani Altuna for rapporteuring.

169 **7 ADOPTION OF REPORT**

170 The report was adopted on 26 March 2026.

171

172 **APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT LIST**

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

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177 **APPENDIX 2: JOINT LIST OF DOCUMENTS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES**

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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181 **APPENDIX 3: AGENDA**

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183 **1. Chair's opening remarks**

184 **2. Adoption of Agenda**

185 **3. Conservation and Management Measures for Seals and Walrus Stocks**

186 3.1. Bearded Seal

187 3.2. Ringed Seal

188 3.3. Harbour and Grey Seals

189 3.4. Harp and Hooded Seals

190 3.5. Walrus

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

192 **5. Any other business**

193 **6. Close of meeting**

194 **7. Adoption of report**

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