

NAMMCO



JOINT MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

24 March 2026

Hotel Hans Egede, Nuuk, Greenland

REPORT

Presented to the 33rd meeting of the Council as NAMMCO/33/FI03



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Abbreviations used in the report:

AEWG: Abundance Estimate Working Group

AG-Fisk: Working Group for Fisheries under the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Fisheries and Aquaculture

BYCWG: Working Group on By-catch

DFO: Fisheries and Oceans Canada

JCNB: Canada Greenland Joint Commission on Narwhal and Beluga

Joint WG (or JWG): NAMMCO-JCNB Joint Working Group

MCC: Management Committee for Cetaceans

MCJ: Joint Management Committee

MCSW: Management Committee on Seal and Walrus

R-: Request

SC: Scientific Committee

UIWG: Working Group on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making

WG: Working Group

1 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

2 The Chair of the Meeting of the Joint Management Committee (MCJ), Jóhann Ásmundsson (Iceland),
3 welcomed participants (listed in Appendix 1) to the meeting. Ásmundsson noted that NAMMCO
4 Deputy Secretaries Maria Garagouni and Naima El bani Altuna would act as primary rapporteurs, with
5 support from the Secretariat as needed.

6 The Chair informed that the joint meeting addresses issues of relevance to both the Management
7 Committee for Cetaceans (MCC) and the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), as
8 well as anything pertaining to the work of the UIWG.

9 Drawing attention to the relevant meeting documents (listed in Appendix 2), which had been made
10 available online two weeks prior to the meeting, the Chair outlined the objectives of the meeting,
11 namely:

- 12 • Reviewing new information and responses to active requests for advice provided by the
13 Scientific Committee during its last meeting in 2026 (SC/32).
- 14 • Determining whether any requests may be considered completed and closed or need to be
15 renewed; making recommendations to Council regarding the status of requests, as needed.
- 16 • Considering both the new and reiterated proposals for conservation and management and
17 recommendations for research (that require national priority and support or concern a shared
18 stock with a non-member country) made by SC/32; deciding whether to forward them to the
19 Parties or not.
- 20 • Considering both the new and reiterated proposals for conservation and management and
21 recommendations for research (that require national priority and support or concern a shared
22 stock with a non-member country) made by SC/32; deciding whether to forward them to the
23 Parties or not.

24 The MCJ also aims at addressing issues related to the Management Committees' Working Group on
25 Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG).

26 2 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

29 3 ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

30 3.1 MARINE MAMMAL–FISHERY INTERACTIONS

31 Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- 32 • **R-1.1.5 (1997, standing)** *To periodically review and update available knowledge related to the*
33 *understanding of interactions between marine mammals and commercially exploited marine*
34 *resources.*
- 35 • **R-1.1.10 (2022, standing as of 2023)** *In light of the distributional shifts seen under T-NASS 2007*
36 *and later surveys, the SC should investigate dynamic changes in spatial distribution due to*
37 *ecosystem changes and functional responses.*

38 Updates from the Scientific Committee

39 The Chair invited Sandra Granquist, Chair of the SC, to present the updates from the SC on marine
40 mammal-fishery interactions.

41 In response to R-1.1.5, the Working Group on By-catch (BYCWG) is tasked with improving the available
42 knowledge on interactions between marine mammals and fishing gear. A research project, hosted by

43 the Secretariat and overseen by the BYCWG, is ongoing to map the potential spatio-temporal risk of
 44 by-catch for different marine mammal species, based on the overlap of fishing effort and species
 45 distribution.

46 Regarding R-1.1.10, the results of the NASS (North Atlantic Sightings Survey) 2024 will shed further
 47 light on changes in distribution that should be taken into account when investigating interactions with
 48 human activities. Abundance estimates for target species have been reviewed by the Abundance
 49 Estimates Working Group (AEWG) and endorsed by the SC, with the exception of fin and minke whales
 50 in Faroese and Icelandic waters. Abundance estimates for non-target species will be reviewed in late
 51 2026 by the AEWG. SC/32 has recommended spatial modelling of all NASS data, which would allow
 52 more comprehensive insights into changes in cetacean distribution over time.

53 **Comments from Parties**

54 Regarding R-1.1.5, the Faroe Islands commented that each Party has already been asked to supply
 55 monthly fishing effort information for all gear types and vessel sizes, to facilitate the mapping of by-
 56 catch risk by the BYCWG. Granquist noted that, as each Party has slightly different reporting schemes
 57 for fisheries, the standardisation of fishing effort takes some time; calculating exposure to the risk of
 58 by-catch is further made challenging due to the different scales and types of information available
 59 regarding species distribution. As such, the BYCWG is mapping this risk at the resolution of ICES
 60 rectangles, as a way to standardise both the fishing effort and species distribution.

61 Iceland inquired whether by-catch is a significant risk for a given population of marine mammals and
 62 what the threshold is for determining how much by-catch is unsustainable. Granquist explained that
 63 this depends largely on the status of the species or stock in question. For example, harbour seals in
 64 Iceland are a relatively small stock for which by-catch poses a big issue. In areas where there is hunting
 65 as well as by-catch of a species, the two factors are compounded, as the total removals are higher than
 66 from the separate activities of hunting and fishing. All types of removals (by-catch or otherwise) must
 67 be included in population assessment models, to ensure sustainable management of a given stock.
 68 Moreover, different fishing gear types may be more threatening for some species than for others, and
 69 this is one reason the BYCWG is examining individual gear types. The Vice Chair of the SC, Anne Kirstine
 70 Frie, added that by-catch poses a serious threat to harbour porpoises and grey seals in Norway. She
 71 also informed of an EU Horizon project (ECO-CATCH) investigating by-catch in the Baltic and North
 72 Seas.

73 To the question on whether areas flagged by the BYCWG as potentially high-risk for marine mammals
 74 would be closed off for fisheries, Granquist informed that this is not the aim of the risk mapping
 75 project. Instead, the goal is to map areas of high or low risk and inform the Parties accordingly as to
 76 how best to allocate monitoring effort. This will serve to improve our knowledge on by-catch rates in
 77 different fisheries, of which there are currently very few estimates in the NAMMCO area. Norway
 78 noted that an additional motivation to obtain more accurate by-catch estimates is to be able to comply
 79 with the United States' Marine Mammal Protection Act; under this act, the USA cannot import fish
 80 taken in fisheries with high marine mammal by-catch rates.

81 **MCJ Conclusion**

82 The MCJ noted the progress made by the BYCWG in their risk mapping project and looked forward to
 83 seeing the results.

84 **3.2 MULTISPECIES APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT AND MODELLING**

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

- 86 • ***R-1.2.1 (renewed 2019, ongoing but not prioritised as of 2023)*** To consider whether
 87 multispecies models for management purposes can be established for the North Atlantic
 88 ecosystems and whether such models could include the marine mammal compartment. If such
 89 models and the required data are not available, then identify the knowledge lacking for such

90 *an enterprise to be beneficial to proper scientific management and suggest scientific projects*
 91 *which would be required for obtaining this knowledge.*

92 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

93 The Chair invited Granquist to present the updates from the SC on multispecies approach to
 94 management and modelling

95 In response to R-1.2.1, Iceland informed at SC/32 of a recently obtained AG-Fisk grant to collate
 96 existing information on modelling approaches, involving researchers from Iceland, Norway, Denmark,
 97 and Canada, and with an aim to investigate species interactions such as predation, depredation, by-
 98 catch, and even parasite loads. In light of this collaboration, it was decided to devote a half-day
 99 discussion session to this topic during SC/33. At that time, it will be decided whether a longer workshop
 100 session should be organised in 2027, to fully respond to this request.

101 **Comments from Parties**

102 No comments were made from the Parties.

103 **MCJ Conclusion**

104 The MCJ took note of the SC's updates and kept the status of R-1.2.1 unchanged.

105 **3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

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

- 107 • **R-1.5.3 (2016, standing as of 2023)** *To monitor the development of the Mary River Project and*
 108 *assess qualitatively or, if possible, quantitatively the likely impact and consequences on marine*
 109 *mammals in the area.*

110 **Updates from the Scientific Committee**

111 The Chair invited Granquist to present the updates from the SC on environmental issues.

112 Addressing R-1.5.3, the SC did not provide any updates on the Mary River Project, as there has not
 113 been a meeting with Canada for several years. However, the SC agreed to add this topic as an agenda
 114 item at the next Joint WG meeting with the JCNB (Joint Commission for Narwhal and Beluga).

115 **Comments from Parties**

116 Greenland reiterated the concern raised in earlier Council meetings about the effects the Mary River
 117 Project might cause to some of the important targeted species, such as narwhal, beluga, walrus, polar
 118 bears, and large whales.

119 In addition to that, Greenland is also deeply concerned about the increasing numbers of large cruise
 120 ships coming into the Greenlandic waters and fjords from Scandinavia, Europe, Canada, the USA, and
 121 other countries, some of them carrying 2,000–3,000 passengers. Both the risk of marine pollution and
 122 noise pollution are of concern, since these activities have a high risk of negative effects on marine
 123 mammals.

124 Furthermore, increasing military and mining exploration and research activities also present challenges
 125 for hunting and fishing activities, disturbing both commercial and subsistence hunting at an increasing
 126 level, both at sea and on land.

127 Greenland informed that in 2025, the Government of Greenland introduced an executive order to
 128 implement zone divisions to limit the access of ships in some sea areas and fjords, to protect wild
 129 animals and nature.

130 Nunavut noted that, from the Canadian side, they are closely monitoring the Mary River Project.
 131 Baffinland, an iron ore mine in Milne Inlet, Baffin Island, conducts shipping during the ice-free period
 132 of the year. As of March 2026, a proposal has been approved to build a railroad to Steensby Inlet
 133 (Ikpikitujuak), and a port to allow ship transport through the Hudson Strait and Foxe Basin. This has

134 raised significant concern among the local people that rely on marine mammals and fish, as the
 135 potential impacts of this expansion may be severe. Nunavut also highlighted another project in the
 136 port of Churchill, Manitoba, which has been identified by the Canadian Government for revitalisation.
 137 Infrastructure upgrades would allow additional railway and shipping capabilities, including year-round
 138 shipping with ice-breaking vessels and an all-weather road to Churchill. The communities along Hudson
 139 Straight and Hudson Bay are very worried about the potential impacts of marine life in that area.

140 On a more positive note, Nunavut gave some insights on their process to limit cruise ship traffic, the
 141 increase of which in certain inlets created concerns for the local hunting communities. The Mittimatalik
 142 Hunters and Trappers Organisation engaged separately with federal government officials in different
 143 departments (Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Transport Canada, and their local Member of
 144 Parliament) and succeeded in blocking cruise ships from entering the fjords and inlets in the region.

145 MCJ Conclusion

146 The MCJ did not formulate any new requests regarding environmental issues.

147 **4 REQUESTS FOR STOCK ASSESSMENT**

148 **4.1 WORDING OF “STALLED” REQUESTS**

149 The Chair invited Garagouni to present the issue with stalled requests for advice from the SC. This
 150 refers to requests which are difficult or even impossible to fulfil, due to a lack of key information,
 151 financial or human resources, or technological and logistical capabilities. Garagouni gave an example
 152 with request *R-2.1.9 (2007, rephrased 2022): To investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline*
 153 *of Greenland Sea stock of hooded seals and assess the status of the stock*. This request has been
 154 extensively discussed at 12 SC meetings and several meetings and a workshop of the ICES-NAMMCO
 155 Working Group on Harp and Hooded Seals (WGHARP); however, the reason for the decline has not yet
 156 been conclusively determined, and the request remains ongoing, despite considerable effort to
 157 respond to it.

158 The SC asked that the wording of stalled requests could be revised to better reflect their status, to
 159 explicitly indicate that they will be undertaken *“as soon as possible”* or *“when data allow”*. This would
 160 acknowledge current limitations without implying inaction. This applies to many requests followed by
 161 the MCs, both for cetaceans and pinnipeds. The MCs were also asked to consider adding a standing
 162 management request for the SC *“to regularly review existing data, identifying data gaps, ways forward,*
 163 *and resources needed to conduct an assessment”*.

164 Comments from Parties

165 Greenland commented that hooded seals in East Greenland are only taken for subsistence purposes,
 166 and the catches are deemed acceptable, as they remain low in number. They moved to add the phrase
 167 *“when data allow”* to any applicable requests. Iceland seconded the motion.

168 MCJ Conclusion

169 The MCJ **agreed** that the Secretariat should add the phrase *“when data allow”* to any and all requests
 170 where it applies. A new standing request was not considered necessary.

171 **4.2 TIMING AND PROCEDURE FOR ROUTINE ASSESSMENTS**

172 The Chair invited Garagouni to present the request from the Secretariat to the Council regarding the
 173 timing and procedure for routine assessments.

174 Each Party has (or may have) specific timing requirements for routine stock assessments of hunted
 175 species in order to set quotas (e.g., Iceland requires an assessment for fin whales every six years). To
 176 facilitate the scheduling of the SC workplan (per R-1.6.8), as well as allocating the necessary research
 177 effort and funding for each assessment, the Parties should present the timing of their assessment

178 needs to the MCs. These requirements could become a standing request for stock assessments, which
179 could be updated as requirements change.

180 **Comments from Parties**

181 Greenland commented that the long-term plan for assessments proposed by the SC (page 59 of
182 NAMMCO/33/08) aligns with their routine requirements, although they noted that the proposed
183 timing for beluga and narwhal assessments has increased in frequency (from 10 to 5 years). In light of
184 changes in climate and weather, Greenland remains flexible to adapt to the unexpected, and supports
185 the current long-term plan of the SC.

186 Iceland supported the formulation of a standing request to the SC to align plans with the Parties'
187 requirements wherever possible (e.g., to assess fin and minke whales every six years for Iceland).

188 Secretary General Geneviève Desportes noted that, with respect to the organisation of Working Group
189 meetings, it would also be helpful to know when quotas are set during the year. For instance, if quotas
190 for fin whales are set in June, then the corresponding WG assessment should not take place later in
191 the year. Therefore, if there is a fixed routine for the establishment of quotas, the Secretariat should
192 be informed of this.

193 **MCJ Conclusion**

194 The MCJ **agreed** that the Parties should provide their routine requirements for stock assessments
195 (frequency and time of year at which quotas are set) to the SC via the Secretariat. A new standing
196 request was proposed under Management Procedures, namely:

197 *R-1.6.9: When scheduling stock assessments, the SC should follow the Parties' requirements for routine
198 assessments, as provided by the Parties.*

199 **5 UPDATE ON MEMBERS' RESPONSES TO PROPOSALS FOR CONSERVATION 200 AND MANAGEMENT**

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

205 **6 WG ON ENHANCING USER INVOLVEMENT IN NAMMCO DECISION 206 MAKING (UIWG)**

207 In NAMMCO/32 the MCJ agreed that the UIWG will pause its activities. It was agreed that the Heads
208 of Delegation would discuss the optimal way forward for the UIWG intersessionally and present their
209 conclusions at this meeting of the MCJ.

210 **Comments from Parties**

211 Greenland reiterated its general support for the involvement of hunters and other resource users in
212 management processes, and informed the Committees that a new Act adopted in 2023, with
213 amendments in 2024, mandates the Cabinet to develop a new Executive Order for the systematic
214 collection of user knowledge. For the time being, Greenland considers such activities to be primarily
215 of national relevance and not yet suited for integration into international processes. Greenland further
216 noted that resource constraints currently limit their ability to participate in such initiatives at the
217 international level, although this may become feasible in the future, potentially within the NAMMCO
218 framework.

219 Norway expressed that, while they would ideally welcome renewed progress of the UIWG, it has
220 proven challenging to identify suitable items for the WG to meaningfully continue its work.

221 Consequently, Norway suggested maintaining the current hiatus of the UIWG. The Faroe Islands
222 supported Norway's position and advocated for continuing the pause to allow for further discussion.
223 Iceland likewise endorsed the positions of Norway and the Faroe Islands. In line with this, Greenland
224 concluded that it remains premature for them to participate in user-involvement processes at the
225 NAMMCO level.

226 MCJ Conclusion

227 The MCJ **agreed** that the UIWG will continue the pause in its activities. The topic will be revisited at
228 NAMMCO 34 (2027).

229 **7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

230 No other business was discussed.

231 **8 CLOSE OF MEETING**

232 The Chair thanked the participants for their attendance and contributions. The participants thanked
233 the Chair for steering the meeting and Garagouni and El bani Altuna for rapporteuring.

234 **9 ADOPTION OF REPORT**

235 The report was adopted on 26 March 2026.

236

237 **APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT LIST**

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

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242 **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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246 **APPENDIX 3: AGENDA**

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248 **1. Chair’s Opening Remarks**

249 **2. Adoption of Agenda**

250 **3. Environmental and Ecosystem perspective**

251 3.1. Marine Mammal–Fishery Interactions

252 3.2. Multispecies approach to management and modelling

253 3.3. Environmental issues

254 **4. Requests for Stock assessment**

255 4.1. Wording of “Stalled” Requests

256 4.2. Timing and procedure for routine assessments

257 **5. Update on members’ responses to proposals for conservation and management**

258 **6. WG on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG)**

259 **7. Any Other Business**

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