

### **33rd Council of NAMMCO – Opening Statement**

#### **Martha Rojas Urrego Executive Secretary, International Whaling Commission March 2026**

It is a great pleasure to join this annual meeting of the Council of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission on behalf of the International Whaling Commission.

This meeting offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on the progress of our collaboration and to reaffirm our shared commitment to cetacean science and stewardship. I particularly welcome the continued alignment between our organisations on abundance estimates, whale killing methods and welfare, and the ongoing exchange between our Scientific Committees — strengthened, as ever, by the many experts who contribute to the work of both.

Between 27 April and 9 May, the IWC Scientific Committee will convene in Bled, Slovenia, to address a substantive agenda covering conservation and management issues of broad relevance. Of particular interest to NAMMCO will be the work advancing towards an in-depth assessment of North Atlantic humpback whales, including results from a hybrid workshop held last week.

This has been the first intersessional period under the IWC Scientific Committee's new biennial meeting format. I am pleased to report that, despite the absence of a full committee meeting last year, intersessional work has continued at pace. Highlights include a meeting of the Abundance Steering Group, which considered and endorsed a number of abundance estimates for Greenlandic stocks — estimates that are integral to the IWC's management of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling under the ICRW.

In the same context, the IWC maintains comprehensive records of historical and current whale catches. This database depends on regular contributions to remain current and effective, and we are grateful to NAMMCO members for their continued support in this regard.

Welfare remains a priority shared by both organisations. The IWC's Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues Sub-Committee will meet on 27 August, in advance of IWC70, and we would welcome any relevant updates from NAMMCO and its members ahead of that meeting.

Beyond the immediate mandates of our two organisations, we are also working in concert to address the growing range of external threats to cetacean populations. Ship strikes, pollution, and climate change demand coordinated, multi-disciplinary responses across numerous international fora. Bycatch, the single greatest threat to cetaceans globally, is being addressed through both NAMMCO's Working Group on Bycatch and the IWC's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, each working closely with the fisheries sector to expand monitoring and mitigation efforts.

My colleagues and I look forward to the discussions over the coming days. I wish to thank NAMMCO members sincerely for their continued engagement with the IWC and for the valuable data they provide, particularly on catches. We look forward to building on our cooperation across our many shared areas of interest, and wish you a productive and successful meeting.