

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 Meeting of the Management Committees

MCSW: Management Committee for Seals 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

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

The Chair informed that the joint meeting addresses issues of relevance to both the Management Committee for Cetaceans (MCC) and the Management Committee for Seals and Walrus (MCSW), as well as anything pertaining to the work of the Management Committees' Working Group on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG).

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

- Reviewing new information and responses to active requests for advice provided by the Scientific Committee during its last meeting in 2026 (SC/32).
- Determining whether any requests may be considered completed and closed or need to be renewed; making recommendations to Council regarding the status of requests, as needed.
- Considering both the new and reiterated proposals for conservation and management and recommendations for research (that require national priority and support or concern a shared stock with a non-member country) made by SC/32; deciding whether to endorse and forward them to the Parties or not.
- Considering updates from the member countries on the proposals for conservation and management measures forwarded in previous years.
- Addressing the status of the UIWG.

2 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

3 ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

3.1 MARINE MAMMAL–FISHERY INTERACTIONS

Active Requests to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

The Chair invited Sandra Granquist, Chair of the Scientific Committee (SC), to present the updates from the SC on marine mammal-fishery interactions.

In response to R-1.1.5, the Working Group on By-catch (BYCWG) is tasked with improving the available knowledge on interactions between marine mammals and fishing gear. A research project, hosted by the Secretariat and overseen by the BYCWG, is mapping the potential spatio-temporal risk of by-catch for different marine mammal species, based on the overlap of fishing effort and species distribution.

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

Comments from Parties

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

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

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

MCJ Conclusion

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

3.2 MULTISPECIES APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT AND MODELLING

Active Request to the Scientific Committee from the Council

- **R-1.2.1 (renewed 2019, ongoing but not prioritised as of 2023)** *To consider whether multispecies models for management purposes can be established for the North Atlantic ecosystems and whether such models could include the marine mammal compartment. If such models and the required data are not available, then identify the knowledge lacking for such an enterprise to be beneficial to proper scientific management and suggest scientific projects which would be required for obtaining this knowledge.*

Updates from the Scientific Committee

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

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

Comments from Parties

No comments were made by the Parties.

MCJ Conclusion

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

3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Active Request to the Scientific Committee from the Council

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

Updates from the Scientific Committee

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

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

Comments from Parties

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

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

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

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

Nunavut noted that, from the Canadian side, they are closely monitoring the Mary River Project. Baffinland, an iron ore mine in Milne Inlet, Baffin Island, conducts shipping during the ice-free period of the year. As of March 2026, a proposal has been approved to build a railroad to Steensby Inlet (Ikpikitujuak), and a port to allow ship transport through the Hudson Strait and Foxe Basin. This has raised significant concern among the local people that rely on marine mammals and fish, as the potential impacts of this expansion may be severe. Nunavut also highlighted another project in the

port of Churchill, Manitoba, which has been identified by the Canadian Government for revitalisation. Infrastructure upgrades would allow additional railway and shipping capabilities, including year-round shipping with ice-breaking vessels and an all-weather road to Churchill. The communities along Hudson Strait and Hudson Bay are very worried about the potential impacts of marine life in that area.

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

MCJ Conclusion

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

4 REQUESTS FOR STOCK ASSESSMENT

4.1 WORDING OF “STALLED” REQUESTS

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

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

Comments from Parties

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

MCJ Conclusion

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

4.2 TIMING AND PROCEDURE FOR ROUTINE ASSESSMENTS

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

Each Party has (or may have) specific timing requirements for routine stock assessments of hunted species in order to set quotas (e.g., Iceland requires an assessment for fin whales every six years). To facilitate the scheduling of the SC workplan (per R-1.6.8), as well as allocating the necessary research effort and funding for each assessment, the Parties should present the timing of their assessment needs to the MCs. These requirements could become a standing request for stock assessments, which could be updated as requirements change.

Comments from Parties

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

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

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

MCJ Conclusion

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

R-1.6.9 (2026, standing): When scheduling stock assessments, the SC should follow the Parties' requirements for routine assessments, as provided by the Parties.

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

Prior to the meeting of the MCJ, 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.

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

In NAMMCO/32 the MCJ agreed that the Working Group on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG) will pause its activities. It was agreed that the Heads of Delegation would discuss the optimal way forward for the UIWG intersessionally and present their conclusions at this meeting of the MCJ.

Comments from Parties

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

Norway expressed that, while they would ideally welcome renewed progress of the UIWG, it has proven challenging to identify suitable items for the WG to meaningfully continue its work. Consequently, Norway suggested maintaining the current hiatus of the UIWG. The Faroe Islands

supported Norway's position and advocated for continuing the pause to allow for further discussion. Iceland likewise endorsed the positions of Norway and the Faroe Islands. In line with this, Greenland reiterated that it remains premature for them to participate in user-involvement processes at the NAMMCO level.

MCJ Conclusion

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

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

8 CLOSE OF MEETING

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

9 ADOPTION OF REPORT

The report was adopted on 26 March 2026.

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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

APPENDIX 3: AGENDA

- 1. Chair's Opening Remarks**
- 2. Adoption of Agenda**
- 3. Environmental and Ecosystem perspective**
 - 3.1. Marine Mammal–Fishery interactions
 - 3.2. Multispecies approach to management and modelling
 - 3.3. Environmental issues
- 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. WG on Enhancing User Involvement in NAMMCO Decision Making (UIWG)**
- 7. Any Other Business**