

Agenda Item 7

Relations with other Bodies

Document 7-03

**North Atlantic Marine Mammal
Commission (NAMMCO):
Statement to the 19th Meeting of the
ASCOBANS Advisory Committee**

Action Requested

- Take note

Submitted by

NAMMCO Secretariat



**NOTE:
IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING THEIR
OWN COPIES OF DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**



NORTH ATLANTIC MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION (NAMMCO)

STATEMENT TO THE 19TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NAMMCO is an international body for cooperation on the conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. The NAMMCO Agreement was signed in Nuuk, Greenland on 9 April 1992 by Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and focuses on modern approaches to the study of the marine ecosystem as a whole, and to understanding better the role of marine mammals in this system.

NAMMCO provides a mechanism for cooperation on conservation and management for all species of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and pinnipeds (seals and walruses) in the region, many of which had not before been covered by such an international agreement. Through regional cooperation, the member countries of NAMMCO aim to strengthen and further develop effective conservation and management measures for marine mammals. Such measures should be based on the best available scientific evidence, and should take into account both the complexity and vulnerability of the marine ecosystem, and the rights and needs of coastal communities to make a sustainable living from what the sea can provide.

NAMMCO seeks to cooperate with other intergovernmental organisations that have related interests in order to further scientific knowledge, avoid duplication of efforts, and promote public knowledge about marine mammals in relation to conservation and management of the ecosystem.

NAMMCO held its 20th annual meeting from 13-15 September 2011, in Oslo, Norway. The meeting was attended by member countries of NAMMCO: the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway. In addition, the Governments of Canada, Denmark, Japan and the Russian Federation were represented by observers, as well as other international governmental organizations within the fields of fisheries and whaling: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), International Whaling Commission (IWC), Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI).

Key conclusions from the meeting and events include the following:

Status of whale stocks

All requested stock assessments for large whale species in the North Atlantic have now been finalized based on sightings data from the Trans North Atlantic Cetacean Sightings Surveys (T-NASS) in 2007, and additionally in 2009. Management procedures applied have been derived from those already developed by the Scientific Committee of the IWC using the Revised Management Procedure (RMP) approach. An RMP-like approach has been recommended by the Scientific Committee of NAMMCO for some large whale stocks in their discussions on general models to be adopted by NAMMCO. These stock assessments by the Scientific Committee of NAMMCO constitute the main basis for catch limits set for some baleen whale stocks (fin and minke whales) in the North Atlantic.

Additionally, based on T-NASS data, an updated abundance estimate for pilot whales has been made in the areas surveyed in 2007. Although the combined area represented is small and not directly comparable with previous surveys, the available information gives no reason to amend previous conclusions on the sustainability of the Faroese catch.

The next regular NASS, North Atlantic Sighting Survey, is being scheduled to take place in 2015, and planning is already under way.

Status of seal stocks

A new Management Plan for **grey and harbour seals** in Norway, reviewed by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee, and implemented in Norway since 2011, is aimed at ensuring sustainable and viable populations of these species within their natural distribution. The Norwegian Ministry of

Fisheries and Coastal Affairs has decided to stabilize the grey seal population at a target level (TL) equal to 1,200 pups born annually, and to stabilize the harbour seal population at a TL of around 7,000 counted animals during the moult. Hunting quotas are used to stabilize the populations at the TL, and measures should be designed to ensure the greatest impact in areas where there is documented significant damage to the fishing industry from seals.

Ecosystem Management and Modeling

The Scientific Committee Working Group on Marine Mammal – Fisheries Interactions continued its work on development of a large international ecosystem modeling project. A network has been established between several leading scientists in this field aimed at securing funding for the project which includes applying four different modeling approaches to two data rich areas, the Barents Sea and Icelandic coastal waters.

Expert Review of Small Whale Killing

The Committee on Hunting Methods convened an expert group in November 2011 to undertake a review and evaluate the killing data and methods for catches of small cetaceans among member and observer countries and other relevant partners, as well as to examine data and information on recent and ongoing research on improvements and technical innovations in hunting equipment.

Independent experts from worldwide contributed to the work of this expert group, including specialists in veterinary science and hunting equipment, and hunters. The report will be available soon (by April 2012) on the website.

Inspection and observation of hunting

A training course for observers appointed under the NAMMCO Joint Control Scheme for the Hunting of Marine Mammals will be organised in 2012, with the purpose of ensuring that NAMMCO observers have an updated understanding of their responsibilities and access to the latest relevant information on the regulation of whaling and sealing in member countries. The purpose NAMMCO's international observation scheme is to provide a mechanism for NAMMCO to monitor whether decisions made by the Commission are respected. NAMMCO appoints observers who oversee hunting and inspection activities in NAMMCO member countries and report their observations to NAMMCO.

NAMMCO Scientific Publications

This series focuses on different topics of concern to NAMMCO member countries. These publications include peer-reviewed scientific papers by international experts, and the most recent publications are - Volume 7 – *North Atlantic Sightings Surveys, (2009)* and Volume 8 – *Harbour Seals in the North Atlantic and the Baltic, (2010)*, following working groups addressing these topics. A new Volume 9 – *Walrus in the North Atlantic* is expected this year. An additional volume on *Age Estimation in Monodontids* is in preparation, following workshops on this topic, held in November-December 2012.

EU trade ban on seal products

The members of NAMMCO reiterated that the ban which was adopted by the EU Council on 27 July 2009 and came into effect on 20 August 2010, ignores and undermines the internationally recognized principles on which conservation and management of marine resources in the North Atlantic are firmly based. It has serious and detrimental consequences for the economies of the many communities dependent on abundant seal stocks across the North Atlantic.

Negotiations have taken place between Norway, Canada and the EU regarding the trade ban, but they did not yield a solution. Presently negotiations on the composition of a WTO Panel are under way among the three parties. Greenland is presently dealing with the consequences of the ban, including the Inuit Exemption, at the governmental and industry level.

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