



**AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION
OF SMALL CETACEANS OF THE
BALTIC, NORTH EAST ATLANTIC,
IRISH AND NORTH SEAS**

ASCOBANS/AC30/Inf.5.1b

7 July 2026

30th MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Bonn, Germany, 1–3 September 2026
Agenda Item 5.1

**CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE FAROE ISLAND REGARDING THE DRIVE HUNT IN
2023–2024**

Mr. Høgne Høydal
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Industry and Trade
Tinganes
PO Box 377
FO-110 Tórshavn

16 November 2023

Dear Mr. Høydal,

I write to you on behalf of the Advisory Committee¹ of ASCOBANS and further to our letter to the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Culture, Mr. Jenis av Rana, on 1 December 2021, to which we have as yet not received a reply. I attach this letter again for your convenience.

Therefore, I will not restate our concerns here but only say that we remain particularly concerned about the very large take of Atlantic White-sided dolphins that occurred in a single drive hunt in September 2021. These concerns were reinforced by the assessment of this by the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission as published in the report of its 2022 meeting, which is available from the IWC website.

We note that the Scientific Committee supported our concern about the sustainability of the takes of Atlantic White-sided dolphins and reiterated its longstanding recommendation that no small cetacean removals (live capture or directed harvest) should be authorised until a full assessment of status has been made.

We believe that the Faroese government made a review of dolphin killing further to the unprecedented 2021 hunt but that no report of this has been made public. We would be pleased to see this assessment, referred to in the press release² issued by the Faroese government, and especially as we understand from the press release that the dolphin hunting will continue.

We would be grateful for a reply to our letters and in particular for information showing the basis for the purported sustainability of the dolphin take.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee



¹ Excluding Denmark which remains neutral in this matter.

² <https://www.government.fo/en/news/news/fisheries-ministry-to-set-annual-limit-on-dolphin-catches/>



UTTANRÍKIS- OG VINNUMÁLARÁÐIÐ

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, INDUSTRY AND TRADE

Ms Katarzyna Kaminska
Chair of the Advisory Committee
ASCOBANS

26 August 2024

Dear Ms Kaminska,

I refer to your letter of 16 November 2023 addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Industry and Trade, Mr Høgni Hoydal, regarding the drive hunt of Atlantic white-sided dolphins which occurred in September 2021.

Please find enclosed an information memorandum on the utilisation of pilot whales and dolphins for food in the Faroe Islands.

As explained in this document, white-sided dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) are a commonly occurring and abundant species around the Faroe Islands. Individual animals occasionally occur together with schools of pilot whales, while separate schools are also sometimes driven and beached, and fully utilised for human consumption.

The driving and killing of dolphins in the Faroe Islands are subject to the same regulatory framework as pilot whales and must be carried out accordingly. With the exception of the unusually large catch in 2021, the average annual catch of white-sided dolphins over the past 20 years has been around 250, with catches fluctuating annually from none to a few hundred. The white-sided dolphin is listed as 'Least Concern' on the European and Global IUCN Red Lists.

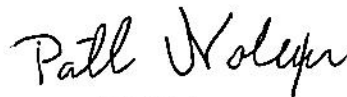
Based on an evaluation initiated by the Government in response to the catch in September 2021, the Ministry of Fisheries introduced an annual catch limit of 500 white-sided dolphins for 2022 and 2023. Measures for 2024 and subsequent years will be based on the full assessment of white-sided dolphins requested from the NAMMCO Scientific Committee.

In November 2023, a working group organised by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee conducted an assessment of the sustainability of the catches of white-sided dolphins in the Faroe Islands. In addition to scientists from the NAMMCO member countries, the working group included invited experts from the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Based on a conservative assessment model, the working group recommended that the most precautionary approach to ensuring sustainable catches is to maintain total removals below 750 animals per year. These conclusions were endorsed by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee at its last meeting in January 2024 and presented at the annual meeting of the NAMMCO Council in March 2024. All reports are available on the NAMMCO website (www.nammco.org).

As you will be aware, NAMMCO and ASCOBANS have formal observer relations as intergovernmental organisations, which provide for regular exchanges of relevant information between secretariats, as well as reciprocal observer attendance at relevant meetings.

The Faroe Islands contribute actively to the work of NAMMCO and its various subsidiary bodies. In addition to the Scientific Committee and its expert working groups, this also includes the NAMMCO Observation Scheme as well as the Committee on Hunting Methods, where best practices are discussed and recommendations are made to NAMMCO member countries regarding improvements to marine mammal hunting methods.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Páll Nolsøe', written in a cursive style.

Páll Nolsøe

Counsellor



UTTANRÍKIS- OG VINNUMÁLARÁÐIÐ

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

Utilisation of pilot whales and dolphins for food in the Faroe Islands

April 2024

Introduction

As a large ocean nation, the Faroe Islands have a strong commitment to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 – to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The Government of the Faroe Islands underlines the right and responsibility of the Faroese people to utilize the resources of the sea sustainably.

Traditional means of food production from local resources are an important supplement to the livelihoods of Faroe Islanders. These include mountain grazing sheep, coastal fishing for household use, seasonal catches of certain seabirds and occasional catches of pilot whales and other small cetaceans.

These food resources have enabled the Faroe Islands as an island nation to maintain a relatively high degree of self-sufficiency in food production. In the Faroe Islands it is considered both economically and environmentally responsible to make the most of local natural resources, and to maintain the knowledge required to make use of what nature provides in a harsh oceanic environment.

Pilot whales and other small whales represent one of few local sources of meat that does not have to be imported from afar. The meat from each whale drive provides valuable food which is distributed for free in the local communities where the whale drives take place. This is protein that would otherwise have to be imported from sources in other countries.

Long-finned pilot whales

Many different species of whales and dolphins occur in the waters around the Faroe Islands, most of which are protected by law. The commonly occurring long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*) are taken for their meat and blubber in whale drives which are organised at the community level and regulated by national legislation and regulations.

The annual catch is on average 600 pilot whales, with numbers fluctuating from year to year. It has long since been internationally recognised that pilot whale catches in the Faroe Islands are sustainable and the stock of pilot whales in the Northeast Atlantic is abundant.

The Faroe Islands cooperate internationally through NAMMCO, the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission, on the conservation of whales and the management of whaling. NAMMCO is an inter-governmental organisation which provides for political, scientific, and technical cooperation on marine mammal conservation and management in the North Atlantic.

For further information on international cooperation on conservation, management and research on whales and seals in the North Atlantic, see NAMMCO - the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission: www.nammco.org.

Regular international scientific sighting surveys in the North Atlantic since 1987 have provided valuable information from which to estimate and monitor the stock abundance of different whale species. The Faroe Islands participate actively in these surveys, with comprehensive coverage across the Faroe Plateau and adjacent areas.

The pilot whale is listed as 'Least Concern' on the European and Global IUCN Red List.

For the latest information on the conservation status of pilot whales in the North Atlantic, see <https://nammco.no/topics/long-finned-pilot-whale/>

Whale drives are only initiated when whales are sighted by chance close to land. The organisation of participants, both in boats and on shore, is crucial in ensuring an effective whale drive. Prevailing weather and tidal conditions will also have a bearing on whether and where a group of whales can be driven and beached. Whale drives in the Faroe Islands mainly occur from May to September.

Whale drives are a dramatic sight to people unfamiliar with the slaughter of mammals. The hunts are, nevertheless, well organised and fully regulated. Faroese animal welfare legislation, which also applies to whaling, stipulates that animals shall be killed as quickly and with as little suffering as possible.

In recent decades, dedicated measures have been taken to improve hunting methods and animal welfare in whale drives. Innovations and improvements to the equipment used in Faroese whaling have been developed on the initiative of experienced participants in the whale drive.

The most recent example is the spinal lance, which is now required equipment for the killing of pilot whales. The lance is used to sever the spinal cord of the whale, which also severs the major blood supply to the brain, ensuring both loss of consciousness and death of the animal within seconds. The spinal lance has been shown to reduce killing time to 1-2 seconds, while also improving accuracy and safety. Normally, an entire pod of whales is killed in less than fifteen minutes.

White-sided dolphins

White-sided dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) are also a commonly occurring and abundant species around the Faroe Islands. Individual animals occasionally occur together with schools of pilot whales, while separate schools are also sometimes driven and beached, and fully utilised for human consumption. The driving and killing of dolphins in the Faroe Islands are subject to the same regulatory framework as pilot whales and must be carried out accordingly.

In response to an unusually large catch which occurred in September 2021, the Ministry of Fisheries introduced an annual catch limit of 500 white-sided dolphins for 2022 and 2023. This will be reviewed for 2024 and subsequent years, based on the newly completed full assessment of white-sided dolphins requested from the NAMMCO Scientific Committee. In addition, high priority will be given to the improvement of killing methods for white-sided dolphins. A prototype spinal lance for use with white-sided dolphins is being tested.

With the exception of 2021, the average annual catch of white-sided dolphins over the past 20 years has been around 250, with catches fluctuating annually from none to a few hundred (see table).

In November 2023, a working group organised by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee conducted an assessment of the sustainability of the catches of white-sided dolphins in the Faroe Islands. In addition to scientists from the NAMMCO member countries, the working group included invited experts from the United

Kingdom, France and Germany. Based on a conservative assessment model. the working group recommended that the most precautionary approach to ensuring sustainable catches is to maintain total removals below 750 animals per year.

The white-sided dolphin is listed as 'Least Concern' on the European and Global IUCN Red Lists.

For the latest information on the conservation status of white-sided dolphins in the North Atlantic, see <https://nammco.no/topics/atlantic-white-sided-dolphin/>.

Annual catches of pilot whales and white-sided dolphins 2009 - 2023

Year	Pilot whales	No of drives	White-sided dolphins	No of drives
2023	897	10	10	2
2022	527	8	0	0
2021	666	11	1423	1
2020	576	4	35	1
2019	682	11	10	1
2018	624	10	256	4
2017	1203	18	488	8
2016	295	5	0	0
2015	501	6	0	0
2014	48	2	0	0
2013	1104	11	430	1
2012	713	10	0	0
2011	726	9	0	0
2010	1107	14	14	1
2009	310	3	170	4

CATCHES IN 2023

Pilot whales:

Ten separate drives took place in 2023 with a total catch of 897 pilot whales.

In 2023, scientists from the Faroe Marine Research Institute fitted a number of animals from two different groups of pilot whales with satellite tracking tags, after which each group was driven out again. One pilot whale was tagged on 26 June, and five animals were tagged on 19 July, both times in Sandavágur.

White-sided dolphins:

Two catches of five white-sided dolphins each took place in 2023.

Three groups of white-sided dolphins were fitted with satellite tracking tags in 2023. Six dolphins were tagged on 10 June in Fuglafjørður and a further two on 27 August in Leynar. Two more were tagged in Norðragøta on 30 August.

The tagging programme is part of on-going research to monitor the behaviour and distribution of white-sided dolphins in the Northeast Atlantic, and as such also the recruitment area of the Faroese harvest. The Marine Research Institute provides updated information on the movements of the tagged animals, see [here](#).

- For further information on whales and whaling in the Faroe Islands, see www.whaling.fo.