

Agenda Item 4.2

Special Species Sessions

Lagenorhynchus species

Document 4.2

**Mass Killing of the Atlantic White-sided
Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) in
the Faroe Islands in September 2021**

Action Requested

- Review
- Consider the proposed draft decision

Submitted by

Germany

MASS KILLING OF THE ATLANTIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) IN THE FAROE ISLANDS IN SEPTEMBER 2021

Draft for the ASCOBANS AC 8.-12.11.2021

Background/Current events

1. Since the 9th century the so called “Grindaráp” or “grind”, a type of whale hunting which involves the beaching and slaughtering of whales, has been practised in the Faroe Islands. Traditionally the hunt involves the Long-Finned Pilot Whale (*Globicephala melas*) and occasionally the Atlantic White-Sided Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*).
2. Over the years, the Faroe Islands have come more and more under criticism for these types of mass killings of whales and dolphins since they have been deemed gruesome and unethical by animal welfare activists, nature conservationists and ASCOBANS member states.
3. There have been attempts by international frameworks to stop “grinds” in the Faroe Islands, so far unsuccessfully. The latest mass killing of over 1,400 Atlantic White-Sided Dolphins at Skálabotnur beach in the Faroe Islands in September 2021, has raised again awareness for that issue. This incredibly large number of animals killed is believed to be the largest grind yet, also considering that usually this species is not the main target of grinds and according to NAMMCO, hunts for that species have decreased greatly since 2006. Looking at Faroese hunting records, in 2019 only 10 dolphins were killed and last year, 2020, a number of 35 animals were killed.
4. This is now in 2021 a massive increase of animals forced to beach and then slaughtered with specific weapons, so called spinal-cord knives, which often result in no direct killing of the animals. This unethical and inhumane manner is very concerning from an animal welfare viewpoint and the high numbers of specimen reached this year give reason for concern from a species conservation perspective as well. In the EU all Cetacean species are protected and from a EU perspective such mass killings should be prevented or phased out - at a short term.

ASCOBANS actions against the killings of small cetaceans like pilot whales and dolphins in the Faroe Islands

5. The grinds in the Faroe Islands affect species and populations that fall under the scope of the ASCOBANS Agreement and there is no contradicting evidence that the populations of Long-Finned Pilot Whales and Atlantic White-Sided Dolphins affected by Faroese hunts also frequent ASCOBANS waters. Therefore, the ASCOBANS Secretariat had already contacted the Faroese Authorities as well as NAMMCO concerning the hunting of pilot whales and other species in 2010, 2011 and 2015, after the issue was brought up to and discussed at the 17th, 18th, and 21st meetings of the Advisory Committee respectively. The exchanges of correspondence between the Secretariat and the Faroese Authorities were conducted in the documents [AC18/Doc.5-06](#) and [AC19/Doc.5-01](#).
6. In 2012, NAMMCO provided a partial assessment on the status of pilot whale stocks in the eastern North Atlantic, which includes the stocks around the Faroe Islands. The assessment concluded that maintaining an annual catch of 678 animals on average is considered sustainable under the [Resolution 3.3 Incidental Take of Small Cetaceans](#) (2000), considering the currently maintained population size. However, there are no more recent data available, which makes it difficult for the ASCOBANS Parties to conclude, whether nowadays the grinds can still be considered sustainable and the populations have not decreased substantially.

7. The extent of the above-mentioned grind in September this year gives even more reason for concern, since the Atlantic White-Sided Dolphin was not hunted for a few years now and therefore few surveys to provide population estimates exist, the latest survey dates back to 2016¹. The species is considered an abundant species but since it receives little management and its population dynamics and trends are not studied adequately, there is no way to know for sure how a catch of this magnitude does affect populations. The hunting of the Atlantic White-Sided Dolphin, if continued like this, might have a detrimental effect on the North Atlantic population and might not be considered sustainable under Resolution 3.3.

Conclusions: Potential strategy

8. The Advisory Committee expresses its deep concern regarding the large number of animals being killed each year in the Faroese grinds. There are serious concerns asking for an immediate change in action:

The “Grindaráp” involves the separation of the dolphins and whales from their social groups while being chased to the beaches, which in turn causes enormous stress for the animals. In particular the “Grindaráp” in September involved - in comparison to the high number of specimen killed - such a small number of hunters that it could not be ensured that the dolphins were killed quickly and without causing unnecessary torture, pain and distress. Even if this is primarily an issue of animal welfare, it concerns the whale and dolphin conservation spirit of the members of the ASCOBANS community and there is a joint consensus, that such actions are rejected.

9. A change in attitude is reflected by the amount of criticism received in the Faroes from their own local community: For instance, the chairman of the Faroese Whalers Association (Faroese: Grindamannafelagið), Ólavur Sjørðarberg, and Danish parliament member for the Faroe Islands, Sjurður Skaale, both expressed criticism concerning the magnitude of the hunt towards the Danish and Faroese press. However, both did not condemn the grinds themselves, but only the extent of it.
10. This might be a starting point to establish quantitative restrictions such as strict hunting quota for the Atlantic White-Sided Dolphin, and hopefully the Long-Finned Pilot Whale as well. Moving forwards, there is the need for more monitoring and management of both species to establish a hunting quota that is sustainable from a conservation standpoint whilst also considering the Faroese traditions and culture. Also, it might give the opportunity, considering the shift of public opinions, to phase out historical hunting and killing weapons and procedures and introduce direct and humane killing measures, which also conform with animal welfare requirements. **However, the preference of the ASCOBANS parties stays, that the Faroe Islands should get rid of this old whaling tradition from the Middle Ages and apply the same strict cetacean protection as the EU member states.**
11. **Draft Decision for the ASCOBANS AC:** [With the exception of Denmark having not taken part in this vote] the ASCOBANS Member States welcome unanimously a letter of the ASCOBANS Secretariat to Denmark and the Faroe Islands based on the conclusions of this Document.

¹ North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO): Atlantic White-Sided Dolphin – Current Abundance and Trends. <https://nammco.no/topics/atlantic-white-sided-dolphin/#1475844082849-433d5060-e5a9> [23.09.2021].