

Agenda Item 2

Opening Statement

Information Document 2.b-ii

**Opening Statements: Observers –
NAMMCO**

Action Requested

Take note

Submitted by

NAMMCO



Note:

Delegates are kindly reminded to bring their own document copies to the meeting, if needed.



NORTH ATLANTIC MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION (NAMMCO)

STATEMENT TO THE 9TH MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO ASCOBANS

NAMMCO is an international regional body for cooperation in the research, conservation, and rational management of all species of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and pinnipeds (seals and walrus) in the North Atlantic. **NAMMCO** aims to support the health and productivity of the North Atlantic marine ecosystem as a whole and has a particular interest in better understanding the impact of anthropogenic activities on marine mammals and their role in this system.

With due regard to the needs of coastal communities, the **NAMMCO** Member Countries (the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway), confirmed at the 25th Meeting of the Council in the [Nuuk Declaration](#) their commitment to ensuring the effective conservation and the sustainable and responsible use of marine mammals through active regional cooperation on research and the improvement of hunting methods, as well as science-based management. Recognising the range of anthropogenic pressures facing North Atlantic marine mammals and the rapid environmental changes taking place, the Parties further committed to increasing their efforts and cooperation in assessing the cumulative impact of nonhunting related anthropogenic stressors, particularly global warming, by-catch, pollution and disturbance.

NAMMCO continues to strongly believe that the unforeseeable consequences for marine mammals and coastal communities from the impacts of climate and other environmental changes make it essential to strengthen the scientific cooperation between organisations for the benefit of marine mammal conservation.

At the occasion of the 8th Meeting of the Parties, **NAMMCO** had invited **ASCOBANS** to **enhance the scientific cooperation between the two organisations** on issues of shared interest, such as the assessment of the North Sea harbour porpoise and by-catch. MOP 8 decided to strengthen its cooperation and interaction with several organisations, including NAMMCO (Decision 3c and Work Plan Activity 61, [Resolution 8.2](#))¹. Following this decision, at the 23rd Advisory Committee, NAMMCO invited ASCOBANS to join NAMMCO and the Norwegian Institute for Marine Research (IMR) in organising a joint international workshop on the status of harbour porpoises in the North Atlantic, a species with serious conservation concerns and populations shared between the regions covered by ASCOBANS and NAMMCO. However, contrary to the constructive decision taken by MOP8, the Advisory Committee agreed that “Parties are invited to send experts or observers to the NAMMCO Working Group on Harbour Porpoises” ([AC23 Action Point 13](#)), but that ASCOBANS as such would not participate in the organisation of the international scientific workshop. NAMMCO, both the Council and the Scientific Committee, expressed its surprise and disappointment regarding this decision in contradiction to the MoP8 resolution 8.2.

The Joint IMR/NAMMCO International Workshop on the Status of Harbour Porpoises in the North Atlantic was held in Tromsø in December 2018. A total of 36 scientists from NAMMCO, Nordic and European countries, the USA and Canada participated. All the putative harbour

¹ Report of the 8TH Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS, Annex 9: Resolution 8.2, Point 3c, page 64; Work Plan Activity 61, page74.

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porpoise assessment areas of the North Atlantic and adjacent waters were considered during the meeting, with information also having been received from scientists working with the southernmost population of North West Africa. With an overarching aim to improve the knowledge base for ecosystem-based management, the central objectives of the workshop were to: a) assemble current information on the biology, abundance and by-catch of harbour porpoises, b) perform assessments of the status of harbour porpoises in different areas of the North Atlantic, and c) identify the gaps in existing knowledge that need to be addressed to understand the status and ecological role of harbour porpoises in these waters.

The workshop provided a timely and highly appreciated opportunity for harbour porpoise scientists to meet, exchange information, collate knowledge, and perform preliminary status assessments. The [workshop report](#), with the collated background information, identified the important knowledge gaps requiring further research and provides a useful preliminary overview of the concern level for all of the different harbour porpoise populations in the North Atlantic and adjacent waters. A new collaborative initiative to better address the stock identity issue was also begun during the meeting. Recognising an ongoing and urgent need for clear assessment units, complete datasets of removals, reliable abundance estimates, and rigorous assessments, the participants saw the workshop and its outcomes not as definitive, but rather as an informative step in an ongoing process towards developing a comprehensive understanding and sound management of harbour porpoise populations in a changing North Atlantic.

Also of potential interest to ASCOBANS is that the **NAMMCO Scientific Committee By-Catch Working Group (BYCWG)** has met 4 times since MoP8, under the chairmanship of Kimberly Murray (NFSC, NOAA). The terms of reference for the BYCWG are to: a) Identify all fisheries with potential by-catch of marine mammals, b) Review and evaluate current by-catch estimates for marine mammals in NAMMCO countries, and c) If necessary, provide advice on improved data collection and estimation methods to obtain best estimates of total by-catch over time.

So far, the BYCWG has primarily reviewed by-catch estimates of marine mammals in the Icelandic cod and lumpfish gillnet fisheries, as well as in the coastal Norwegian cod and monkfish gillnet fisheries. It has endorsed some of these estimates and provided advice for the re-analysis of others. It is also looking into by-catch in the Faroe Islands and Greenland and is moving towards conducting a risk assessment for all fisheries of NAMMCO parties. Reports of the BYCWG can be found [here](#).

NAMMCO is also proud to announce that all the abundance estimates that could be generated from the **30-year North Atlantic Sightings Surveys (NASS) series** have now been generated. After being reviewed by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee WG on Abundance Estimates and endorsed by the Scientific Committee, the latest estimates are now being published in Volume 11 of the NAMMCO Scientific Publications series “Sightings Surveys in the North Atlantic: 30 years of counting whales”. [Volume 11](#) provides survey specific results as well as 30-year trends of abundance for several species, including several species of small cetaceans of interest to ASCOBANS.

At its 25th Annual Meeting (2017), the NAMMCO Council agreed to undertake a **Performance Review of the Organisation**. The Performance Review Panel, which was nominated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Whaling

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Commission (IWC) and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), carried out the review in 2018-2019. The Chair of the Panel presented the review and its conclusions to the 27th meeting of the Council (2019). The Report of the Performance Review Panel can be found [here](#).

In summary, the Panel found that the Commission was meeting its objective, as stated in the NAMMCO Agreement, by contributing "through regional consultation and cooperation to the conservation, rational management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic". Outputs from NAMMCO's Management Committees, Scientific Committee and Committee on Hunting Methods were also concluded as having been significant and substantial. The Panel noted that NAMMCO had attained a level of credibility among other organizations involved in Arctic issues and marine mammal conservation. Its work was deemed to be valued, relied upon and sought after. NAMMCO was seen to be a preeminent and credible forum for discussions of the conservation and management of marine mammals in the Arctic and Northern Atlantic regions. Furthermore, the Panel found that all NAMMCO member countries share NAMMCO's commitment to ensuring the sustainable management of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. They had, for the most part, implemented the recommendations and the conservation and management measures proposed by the Commission in a timely fashion, although it was noted that there have been some instances in which they had not.

The Panel concluded that while NAMMCO had performed well, there was still room for improvement. For this it provided a total of 95 specific recommendations and suggestions on how the Commission could improve various aspects of its performance and identified some significant concerns. In response, the Council 27 established an ad hoc Working Group (PRWG) to review the recommendations and seek the views of NAMMCO Committees and working groups on those specific to their areas of work. Taking their input into account, the PRWG will propose to Council 28 any relevant follow up actions. Due to the COVID19 situation, Council 28 will take place in March 2021 rather than March 2020 as initially planned.

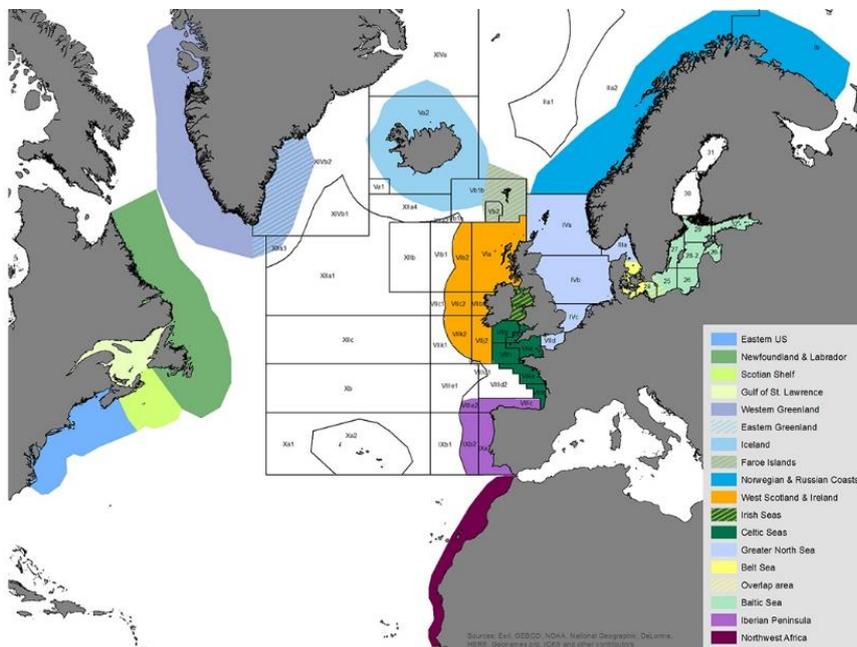
Since MoP8, NAMMCO has held 3 meetings of the Council, 3 meetings of the Management Committees and four meetings of the Scientific Committees, as well as several Working Groups and one Workshop. It also commissioned a review of current knowledge and threats to conservation for Killer whales in the North Atlantic, which was presented to the Scientific Committee as its 25th meeting and is now published². All reports (as all NAMMCO documents) are publicly accessible on the NAMMCO website under [Library](#).

NAMMCO wishes all the participants a productive meeting and success in addressing the pressing conservation issues facing small cetaceans within the Agreement Area and looks forward to enhanced future cooperation between ASCOBANS and NAMMCO for the benefit of small cetacean conservation.

² E. Jourdain, F. Ugarte, G.A. Vikingsson...and G. Desportes. 2019. North Atlantic killer whale *Orcinus orca* populations: a review of current knowledge and threats to conservation. *Mammal Review* 49(4): 384-400.



Some of the 36 scientists participating in the Joint IMR/NAMMCO International Workshop on the Status of Harbour Porpoises in the North Atlantic, 3-7 December 2018, Tromsø, Norway.



Map of the assessment areas for harbour porpoise in the North Atlantic as decided and used during the Joint IMR/NAMMCO International Workshop on the Status of Harbour Porpoises in the North Atlantic, with the ICES fishing areas super-imposed. Data sources: ICES; SAMBAH; (Wessel & Smith, 1996). Cartography: Solveig Enoksen; NAMMCO.

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