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NAMMCO



FINAL PRESS RELEASE

Thirteenth Meeting of the NAMMCO Council

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) held its 13th meeting 2 - 4 March 2004 in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands. The meeting was attended by delegations from the member countries, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway. In addition to the Governments of Canada, Denmark, Japan and the Russian Federation who have observer status to NAMMCO, a number of international governmental and non-governmental organisations follow the work of NAMMCO closely by attending annual meetings. Attending this year were representatives from the International Whaling Commission and the Nordic Council, as well as the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. from Nunavut in Canada and other interest groups. In statements to the meeting, the observers from the Government of Japan and the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters of Chukotka in the Russian Federation expressed their strong support for NAMMCO as a model for international cooperation in other regions on the conservation, management and study of whales and seals.

- **Ecosystem approach:** Implementing an ecosystem approach to the management of marine mammals is the focus of new work under development in NAMMCO, with the active participation of Canada. Plans are underway to develop a case study on harp seals in the North Atlantic – examining the range of issues related to a broad management approach, including the ecological role of harp seals, as well as social and economic factors which influence conservation and management decisions in sealing activities in the region. The Scientific Committee will also be providing advice on different levels of harvest of harp and hooded seals in the North Atlantic in the light of an ecosystem approach to the management of these abundant and increasing stocks.
- **Narwhal and Beluga:** Grave concern was expressed over the preliminary conclusions on the status of the West Greenland narwhal, where substantial reductions in harvesting will be required to reduce the decline of this stock. Greenland has recently taken regulatory measures to protect both narwhal and beluga off West Greenland.
- **Grey seals:** There has been a decline in the stock of grey seals around Iceland over the past 10 years, and it was recommended that Iceland should define clear management objectives for this stock. Similarly, present quotas (although not harvests) in Norway may be above sustainable levels, and again it was recommended that clear management objectives be defined.
- **Minke and fin whales:** Minke and fin whales around Iceland are probably at or near pre-exploitation levels. Advice from the Scientific Committee indicated that annual harvests of up to 200 minke whales and 150 fin whales would be sustainable. Because of the great uncertainty in the stock identity of fin whales around the Faroes, no advice on sustainable harvest levels could be provided for this area.
- **North Atlantic Sighting Surveys (NASS):** New abundance estimates for minke, humpback and several other species were provided from the 2001 and earlier surveys. The NASS have been highly successful in providing important information on the distribution and abundance of cetaceans over a broad area of the North Atlantic. This information becomes more valuable every time a survey is completed, as it provides an indication of trends in abundance over meaningful time periods. The Scientific Committee will therefore coordinate the efforts of member countries in planning and conducting a large scale sightings survey in 2006, in cooperation with other jurisdictions.
- **New requests for scientific advice:** In 2004 the Scientific Committee will provide advice on the population status of humpback whales, killer whales, harp and hooded seals and walrus. In addition the Committee will continue its evaluation and modelling of the interactions between marine mammals and fisheries.
- **Importance of research:** The NAMMCO member countries place great importance on marine mammal research. This scientific research is vital to enhance knowledge and understanding of marine mammals as a basis for management. The member countries support scientific research that includes the taking of whales, as a part of the important work that is done on marine mammals and their role in the marine ecosystem.
- **User knowledge:** Through a newly established working group, NAMMCO continues to work towards better incorporating user knowledge in the management decision-making process.
- **New Chair:** Kate Sanderson of the Faroe Islands was elected as Chair of the NAMMCO Council for the next two years. The next meeting of NAMMCO will be held in March 2005 in Norway.

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