



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tromsø, 1 March 2007

Serious concerns expressed about anti-sealing campaigns at NAMMCO meeting

At the Annual NAMMCO Meeting in Tromsø, Norway this week, serious concerns were expressed about ongoing campaigns to ban imports of sealskins and seal products in certain European countries.

Delegations to the meeting noted that such campaigns ignore the wealth of information available through NAMMCO and from sealing nations across the North Atlantic on the abundance of most seal stocks, the responsible management measures in place and international cooperation between sealers and veterinary experts on hunting methods. Bans on trade in seal products can have serious economic consequences for nations and communities who make their living from utilising these abundant resources sustainably.

Health benefits of seal and whale oil

Research indicates that the consumption of seal and whale oil can have even more positive health benefits than ordinary fish oil, especially with regard to certain allergies, heart conditions and rheumatic ailments. NAMMCO plans to arrange a Workshop on the Positive Health Effects of Consuming Marine Mammal Products to review updated information and research findings in this area.

Listing of Endangered Species

At the request of Iceland, the NAMMCO Scientific Committee carried out a review of the appropriateness of the current listing of the Central North Atlantic fin whales in Appendix I (threatened with extinction) of CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species). The Scientific Committee concluded that this fin whale population does not meet any of the biological criteria for listing under Appendix I of CITES.

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These and other issues were discussed at the 16th Annual Meeting of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission, which ended today in Tromsø. The four member countries of NAMMCO - the Faroes, Greenland, Iceland and Norway – agreed on a number of specific matters related to the conservation, management and study of seal, walrus and whale stocks in the North Atlantic. The meeting was also attended by observers from the governments of Canada, Japan and Denmark and representatives from a number of inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations. A more detailed overview of the main discussions, conclusions and recommendations from the meeting is attached.

Overview of key conclusions and recommendations from the 16th Annual Meeting of NAMMCO

Trans North Atlantic Sightings Survey (T-NASS) – 2007

NAMMCO was pleased to see that plans for this survey, which is being organised by the Scientific Committee and includes participation from all NAMMCO member countries as well as Canada and the Russian Federation, are well underway. The survey will cover the northern North Atlantic from shore to shore in July this year and will be closely coordinated with simultaneous surveys conducted off western Europe and the USA.

Seals, Sealing and Walruses

The newly formed Management Committee for Seals and Walruses met for the first time, with the attendance of observers from the Government of Canada. Specific recommendations included:

- **Hooded seals in the Greenland Sea**

The stock status and apparent decline of hooded seals in the Greenland Sea should be investigated, and catches of hooded seals in the Greenland Sea should be limited to necessary scientific catches and catches for local consumption.

- **Harbour seals**

Assessment of the status of harbour seals around Iceland and Norway should be undertaken as soon as possible and management objectives for harbour seals in Norway, Iceland and Greenland should be defined.

- **Walrus**

A formal assessment of the Davis Strait stock of walrus should be undertaken as soon as possible after the 2007 survey.

- **Grey seals in Norway**

Management objectives for grey seals in Norway should be defined.

Whales and Whaling

The Management Committee on Cetaceans considered the latest scientific advice on whale stocks of interest to NAMMCO member countries and made a number of conclusions and recommendations, including:

- **Humpback whales off West Greenland**

NAMMCO accepted the conclusion of the Scientific Committee that a removal of up to 10 animals per year would not harm the stock off West Greenland and proposed that Greenland limit annual removals of humpback whales, including by-caught and struck and lost whales, to 10.

- **Narwhals and belugas**

NAMMCO has previously expressed grave concern on the apparent decline of stocks of narwhals and belugas in West Greenland, and while commending Greenland for the recent introduction of quotas, there is still serious concern that present takes of narwhals and belugas in West Greenland, according to the advice of both the NAMMCO Scientific Committee and the Canada/Greenland Joint Commission on Narwhal and Beluga Scientific Working Group are not sustainable and will lead to further depletion of the stocks.

- **Harbour porpoises**

Reliable estimates of abundance and estimates of directed and by-catch are lacking for this species from most NAMMCO member countries. NAMMCO therefore recommended that member countries conduct appropriate surveys and monitoring programmes to provide this information, so that the conservation status of harbour porpoises can be assessed.

- **Pilot whales**

Noting that it had been over 10 years since the Scientific Committee had concluded that the take of pilot whales in the Faroe Islands was sustainable, NAMMCO advised that updated estimates abundance and new information on biological parameters would be required to update the assessment. NAMMCO therefore recommended that this be taken into account in the planning of the T-NASS survey, and directed the Scientific Committee to develop a monitoring programme to gather basic biological data from animals taken in the hunt.

- **Fin whales in the Central North Atlantic**

In March 2006 the first joint workshop between the NAMMCO and IWC Scientific Committees was held, which dealt with the catch history, stock structure and abundance of North Atlantic fin whales. This Workshop was highly successful and NAMMCO looks forward to further scientific cooperation with the IWC.

At the request of Iceland, the Scientific Committee carried out a review of the appropriateness of the current CITES listing Central North Atlantic fin whales, in Appendix I (threatened with extinction). The Committee concluded that this fin whale population does not meet any of the biological criteria for listing under Appendix I.

- **Minke whales**

Noting that the sampling phase of the Icelandic Research Programme, which will provide required data on the feeding ecology of minke whales, will be completed

this year, NAMMCO requested the Scientific Committee to review the new information and multi-species modelling as soon as these become available.

Hunting Methods

- **“Struck and Lost” in marine mammal hunting**

An International Workshop on the issue of “struck and lost” animals in hunting was held during November 2006. The workshop was attended by experts, hunters and managers and several organisations from the NAMMCO countries as well as from Canada, Russia, USA, Japan, Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Many recommendations were adopted by consensus for reducing the incidence of lost animals in hunting, better monitoring and reporting, improving communication between hunters, scientists and managers and improving safety for hunters. There were also specific recommendations related to different kinds of hunting for large whales, small whales, seals and walrus.

- **New workshop on handling, processing and utilisation of products**

NAMMCO agreed to organise a new workshop on handling, processing and utilisation of marine mammal products, to be held in 2008. This workshop will be the fifth in a series of workshops/conferences addressing specific hunting-related issues in the past 10 years.

- **Valuable dialogue on hunting methods**

NAMMCO recognises the value of workshops where hunters, scientists, technical experts and managers can meet to exchange ideas and viewpoints on hunting matters, and where mutual respect and cooperation can be fostered.

International Observation of Marine Mammals

NAMMCO has since 1998 had an International Scheme for the observation of marine mammals, the only such scheme in force, which provides international oversight in the regulation of marine mammal hunting in NAMMCO member countries. The scheme now requires an update to take account of technical developments and safety requirements for observers on board whaling and sealing vessels. In 2007, whaling in the Faroes will be subject to observation through NAMMCO.

The next annual meeting of NAMMCO will be held in Greenland in 2008.

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