



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **4 September 2008**

### **Regional management of whales and seals in the North Atlantic is the way forward**

Whaling and sealing nations in the North Atlantic, meeting in Sisimiut, Greenland this week, confirmed their commitment to ensuring the sustainable utilisation of marine mammals through science-based management decisions, stressing the vital importance whales and seals have as renewable resources for economies and cultures across the region.

Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Norway are members of NAMMCO – the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission, an international body for cooperation on the conservation, management and study of whales, seals and walruses in the North Atlantic, which held its 17th annual meeting this week in Greenland. The Commission was established in 1992 through an agreement which provides the organisation with the international competence to make recommendations to member countries on conservation and management measures for all stocks and species of whales and seals in the region.

In the light of interest expressed by Greenland in resuming a catch of humpback whales in its waters, the Cetacean Management Committee of NAMMCO recommended that the total quota of humpbacks in West Greenland in 2009, including by-catches, should not exceed 10 animals. This recommendation was based on the 2006 advice from the NAMMCO Scientific Committee that such a level of catch is well within sustainable limits, and noting that the most recent abundance estimate for West Greenland humpbacks from 2007 is higher than the previous estimate from 2005.

New abundance estimates for a number of other key whale stocks in the North Atlantic, including fin whales, minke whales and pilot whales are also expected to be completed in the very near future. These will be based on data from the comprehensive Trans North Atlantic Cetacean Sightings Survey carried out in July 2007 and coordinated by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee. T-NASS was the largest contiguous cetacean sighting survey of its kind ever conducted, spanning the North Atlantic with participation by Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Faroe Islands, Norway and Russia, and in partnership with surveys carried out at the same time in the USA and in European waters. Regular monitoring of trends in the size of whale populations and their distribution through sightings surveys are an essential tool in the management of whale stocks.

The results of the T-NASS survey, as well as the Icelandic minke whale research programme, fisheries surveys and other studies point to significant changes in North Atlantic marine ecosystems in recent years. NAMMCO has therefore requested its Scientific Committee to examine the latest information on these changes and the nature of predator-prey relations, and their implications for the management of all marine resources.



Sealing was also a major focus of this year's NAMMCO meeting. The Commission has requested a special meeting of experts to assess best practices in different forms of seal hunting. The NAMMCO Committee on Hunting Methods brings veterinary experts and hunters together on a regular basis to review and exchange experiences on methods and equipment used in whaling, sealing and walrus hunting and to make recommendations for improvements.

Although NAMMCO does not deal formally with trade issues, moves within the European Union towards imposing import bans on seal products prompted all member countries at the NAMMCO meeting this week to express their serious concerns about the implications such trade barriers can have for the responsible management and sustainable use of abundant seals stocks across the North Atlantic, and the economies of the many communities dependent on these resources.

The health benefits of consuming whale and seal oil were the subject of a specialist workshop organised by NAMMCO and its report on the most recent research findings and further research requirements was presented to the meeting. The health risks associated with high levels of pollutants in some species of small whales and seals warrants continued monitoring. But the documented health benefits of a diet rich in marine fats need to be balanced against these risks. NAMMCO members stressed that stronger global efforts to reduce pollution in the marine environment were crucial to ensuring that the high quality food provided by marine mammals can continue to contribute to both local and global food security.

In summing up the meeting and concluding her term as Chair of the NAMMCO Council, Kate Sanderson from the Ministry of Fisheries and Natural Resources in the Faroe Islands, said: "For our nations in the North Atlantic, with a fundamental stake in conserving our marine resources and utilising them sustainably, it is clear that NAMMCO's regional approach to cooperation on the management of whaling and sealing is a constructive and effective way to work, as is our regional approach to fisheries cooperation in the region. Hopefully this can also serve as a model for other regions around the world."

Halvard P. Johansen of the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs in Norway was elected as the new chair of the NAMMCO Council.

--00--

For more details, see [www.nammco.no](http://www.nammco.no) or contact the NAMMCO Secretariat:

NAMMCO  
Polar Environmental Center  
N-9296 Tromsø  
Norway  
Tel.: +47 77750180  
E-mail: [nammco-sec@nammco.no](mailto:nammco-sec@nammco.no)

General Secretary - Dr Christina Lockyer mobil: +47 99 58 54 51

NAMMCO

