



MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR SEALS AND WALRUSES

3-4 September 2008, Sisimiut, Greenland

1. CHAIRPERSON'S OPENING REMARKS

Chair Amalie Jessen (Greenland) welcomed delegates and the observers to the Management Committee on Seals and Walruses (SMC).

Reminding the convened Delegates of the §10 of the NAMMCO agreement the Chair renewed NAMMCO's invitation to the governments of Canada and the Russian Federation to join the Commission.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted (Appendix 1).

3. APPOINTMENT OF RAPPORTEUR

The Secretariat was appointed as rapporteur.

4. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR SEAL STOCKS

Documents referred to are listed in Appendix 2. Note that all recommendations to member countries agreed below are summarised in Appendix 3.

4.1 Harp seals

The Committee noted that there was an ongoing request for advice from NAMMCO/15: to evaluate how both a projected decrease and a projected increase in the total population of Northwest Atlantic harp seals might affect the proportion of animals summering in Greenland.

Harp seals are a hunted stock with monitoring and surveys at most every 5 years. A survey in the Greenland Sea in 2007 produced data on pup production for harp seals in the West Ice. A concentration of white coats (harp seal pups) was observed for the first time in Southwest Greenland in April 2007.

Advice from the Scientific Committee

The Committee **noted** and **supported** the following recommendations from the Scientific Committee:

1. A possible southward relocation of breeding by harp seals should be investigated by means of aerial surveys.
2. The Scientific Committee reiterated its recommendations (2004, 2005 and 2006): that a request concerning how a projected decrease in the total population of Northwest Atlantic harp seals might affect the proportion of animals summering in Greenland was to be addressed to the ICES-NAFO WG by Greenland through ICES, in time to be dealt with at the Joint ICES-NAFO WG meeting in Tromsø in August 2008. Greenland in fact raised a new concern that the population is increasing and not decreasing.

The Commission had recommended last year that Greenland take the initiative of forwarding the request of advice to the ICES/NAFO WG. Greenland informed that the request had unfortunately not been conveyed yet, but that this would be done.

3. Request for support from the NAMMCO Council to the Joint Norwegian-Russian Research Programme on Harp Seal Ecology. To this end the Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission initiated a Joint Norwegian-Russian research Programme on Harp Seal Ecology. Full support to this programme was given at NAMMCO SC/14. However, the Russian authorities (Federal Technical Committee) refused the deployment of satellite tags in the White Sea in May both in 2007 and 2008.

Requests for advice

The Committee **supported** the request from the Scientific Committee for NAMMCO to address a recommendation to the Russian authorities to allow the deployment of satellite tags in the White and Barents Sea in 2009 as part of the harp seal ecology study, and **recommends** that the Russian authorities allow the continuation of this study.

The Committee **requested** the Scientific Committee to establish a quota system for the common stocks between Norway and the Russian Federation and advice on Total Allowable Catches (TAC) for the management of this species be referred to the NAMMCO SC, leaving full freedom to the Committee to decide on the best methods to determine this parameter based on an ecosystem approach.

4.2 Hooded seals

Status of past proposals

The Committee noted that there had been a recent request from NAMMCO 16: that catches of hooded seals in the Greenland Sea should be restricted to necessary scientific catches and to satisfy local needs at roughly current levels.

Hooded seals are currently at 10-15% of the 1940s abundance, and there is monitoring and a very restricted harvest. The Scientific Committee had been requested to investigate possible reasons for the apparent decline of the Greenland Sea stock of hooded seals and also to assess the status of the stock on basis of the results from the planned survey in 2007. A survey in the Greenland Sea in 2007 produced data on pup production for hooded seals in the West Ice.

Advice from the Scientific Committee

The Committee **noted** that the Scientific Committee's recommendation that a request be addressed to the ICES-NAFO WG regarding the declining hooded seals in the Greenland Sea had in fact been forwarded to the ICES-NAFO Working Group by Norway and has been dealt with at the August 2008 meeting in Tromsø. The report of the ICES-NAFO WG meeting and the answers to the request will be dealt with at the NAMMCO 16 SC meeting in 2009.

There were no new proposals and recommendations for scientific research nor proposals for conservation and management.

4.3 Ringed Seals

The Committee noted that there were no outstanding requests and no new information to report for this species. The last assessment was carried out in 1996. Since that time there has been little progress and still very little is known on this species, mainly on behaviour.

Advice from the Scientific Committee

The Committee **supports** the Scientific Committee's reiteration of its previous recommendations to initiate studies for addressing the importance of pack-ice breeding seals.

There were no new proposals and recommendations for scientific research nor proposals for conservation and management.

4.4 Grey Seals

Status of past proposals

The committee noted the recent request from NAMMCO 16: a request for definition of management objectives in Norway.

Advice from the Scientific Committee

The last assessment advice was given in 2003. Iceland had presented a management plan in 2004 and a new survey is planned for 2008. In the Faroes there is a need for immediate effort to gather better information on population, removals and breeding sites.

In response to a recommendation from the Scientific Committee for provision of data on age composition of catch, Iceland reminded the Committee that the data

on age composition is owned by private parties and thus it is difficult to gather these kinds of data. Iceland will however try to obtain these data and to present them to the next meeting at Scientific Committee meeting providing that the issue of private ownership of the data is resolved.

Norway informed that a quota of 25% of the population has been established taking into consideration the estimated by-catch levels. A new population estimate for the period 2006-8 will soon be available, and a management plan, complemented by a genetic study, will be presented to the next Scientific Committee meeting in 2009.

The Faroese reported that efforts were being undertaken to obtain better information on population, removals and breeding sites for this species, and that satellite tagging of grey seals has been attempted and is in progress.

There were no new proposals and recommendations for scientific research nor proposals for conservation and management.

4.5 Harbour seals

Status of past proposals

The Committee noted a request from NAMMCO 16: to define management objectives for harbour seals in Norway, Iceland and Greenland.

There was also a request from NAMMCO 16 to the Scientific Committee: to conduct a formal assessment of the status of harbour seals around Iceland and Norway as soon as practicable.

In Iceland, new abundance estimates are available, but there is still insufficient information on by-catch. Norway implemented a system for assessment of the two coastal seal species that secures updated information about abundance approximately every 5 yr. This system has provided two abundance estimates after 1996. As a third point estimate is needed for an assessment for harbour seals another survey is needed and will probably be performed by 2010.

Advice from the Scientific Committee

A first assessment by the Scientific Committee was executed in 2006 and showed that this species is at risk in all areas due to substantial decrease and / or unsustainable takes. No management plan has yet been devised in any of the countries. However, Greenland has started a research plan. In Norway, correction factors for minimum counts are under development.

The Scientific Committee considered that an assessment of the species should wait until a third abundance estimate is available from Norway and until new, reliable by-catch data, new information on multipliers (ground truthing), and the distribution of catch areas are secured. It is reasonable to imagine that the

management plan will be ready by 2010. A similar timeframe will also be required for Iceland to develop its own programme.

The Committee **noted** the following earlier recommendations from the Scientific Committee from 2006:

- More efficient monitoring of by-catch in all fisheries.
- Continued and frequent abundance surveys in Norway and Iceland.
- Estimation of the size of the remaining Greenlandic population.
- Statement of clear management objectives in Norway, Iceland and Greenland.
- Design of a plan for the Faroe Islands in case there was a re-colonisation.
- That Greenland enforces a total ban on the hunt of harbour seals.

In addition the Committee supported the following and reiterated recommendations from the SC:

- That Iceland undertakes a formal assessment of the stock and establishes clear management objectives., as well as obtains information on by-catch.
- That Norway collects data on by-catch and devises a management plan.
- An assessment of harbour seals should await the following:
 - A third Norwegian abundance estimate, including information on multipliers and distribution of catch areas.
 - A reliable reporting of by-catch data and age composition of takes in all areas.
 - An assessment should therefore be performed in 2010.

Iceland informed that a new abundance estimate is presently available, but reliable by-catch information is still missing. Furthermore, a management plan is being designed and in particular that management objectives are being defined.

Norway reported that new abundance estimates, calculated according to the recommendations of the Scientific Committee, will be carried out in 2010. At this time by-catch information from 2006 will also be available from the new by-catch monitoring programme. A management plan is expected to be completed by autumn 2008

Greenland informed that a draft of an executive order on protection and hunting of seals in Greenland is under construction and in this a ban on hunting of harbour seal is included.

There were no new proposals and recommendations for scientific research nor proposals for conservation and management.

4.6 Atlantic Walrus **Status of past proposals**

The Committee noted two requests from Council for advice from the Scientific Committee:

1. NAMMCO 13 and 16: requested the provision of a formal assessment of the Davis Strait stock as soon as finalisation of the catch series is complete and the results from the planned 2007 survey are available; and subsequently to provide estimates of sustainable yields of the North Water and West Greenland stocks of walrus.
2. NAMMCO 15: requested the SC specifically to provide advice on the effects of human disturbance, including fishing and shipping activities, in particular scallop fishing, on distribution, behaviour and conservation status of walrus in West Greenland

Advice from the Scientific Committee

Present removals were reported as likely not sustainable for the North Water and West Greenland stocks. The last assessment was made in 2005, but it was incomplete because of the lack information on stock delineation and abundance information. A revised corrected catch series (including “struck-and-lost”) was also needed.

Considerable progress has been made on catch series in all areas and most items. Results are planned for December 2008, but no progress has been made in improving the old catch series (up to 2006) for Greenland.

The hypothesis of a common stock of walrus between Canada and Greenland has been “confirmed” (West Greenland walruses have been observed wintering in eastern Baffin Island).

New data are anticipated in the summer 2009 on survey and tagging in the North Water, and a survey in East Greenland.

Regarding the assessment of West Greenland-Eastern Baffin Island stock, there would be sufficient new data by the end of 2008/09, but not before, so that a WG could not be convened to make the assessment.

No progress was reported on the subject of human disturbance on West Greenland walrus.

Requests for advice

The Committee **supported** the Scientific Committee’s recommendations for a new assessment which was feasible either as :

1. An assessment of West Greenland-Eastern Baffin Island only (due early 2009, before the SC meeting); or
2. A full assessment of North Water, West Greenland-Eastern Baffin Island and East Greenland (due late 2009 or early 2010).

Greenland underlined the need to complete the full assessment before late 2009, and therefore requested the Scientific Committee to provide a full assessment (option 2.) in time for the establishment of quotas. The Committee **recommends** that the Greenlandic authorities make sure the researchers from the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR) are aware of this request.

There were no new proposals and recommendations for scientific research nor proposals for conservation and management.

5. PROCEDURES FOR DECISION-MAKING ON CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

This item was discussed in a joint session with the Management Committee for Cetaceans and is to be found in the report of that Committee (Section 2.1, Item 5.).

6. RELATED MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Items 6.1 and 6.2 were discussed in a joint session with the Management Committee for Cetaceans and are to be found in the report of that Committee (Section 2.1, Items 6.1 and 6.2).

6.3 User Knowledge in Management Decision-making

The Committee **agreed** to disband the Working Group on User Knowledge and to reconsider the issue for the next meeting (during NAMMCO 18).

7. TRADE ISSUES AND THE EU PROPOSAL ON BAN OF IMPORT OF SEALSKIN

In 2008 the European Commission resolved on a ban on the import of sealskin. The case has been ongoing since January 2006 with a long series of meetings and hearings.

It was underlined that NAMMCO is a management body and not a lobby organization. NAMMCO member countries share views on management resources, scientific approach to management and on sustainable use. Thus ideally NAMMCO should lead by example as a management body (*i.e.* by publicising work such as the activities of the Committee on Hunting Methods). It was stressed that the proposed ban was not taken as a conservation and management measure.

However, the SMC expressed their serious concerns about the implications that such trade barriers can have on 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.

Statement by the ICC:

Aqqaluk Lyngø, president of the ICC-Greenland, presented a statement which can be found as Appendix 4 of the Report of the Management Committee for Cetaceans (Section 2.1). The reference therein to hunting and world perception of hunting rights was also of relevance to sealing.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sealing Symposium

Norway reported on the Norwegian-Russian Symposium in Tromsø, 25-26 August 2008, on *Prospects for Future Sealing in the North Atlantic*. The programme included several presentations from Norwegian, Russian and other sources, including:

- Status and management of harp and hooded seals in Canada
- Russian hunt and prospects
- New Russian boat approach
- Management objectives for the Norwegian seal hunt
- Greenland Sea sealing
- KNAPK view on sealing
- Traditional products from the seal hunt: status and prospects
- Seal oil and contributions to human health
- Report from the Vaasa Seals and Society conference (October 2007)
- Sustainable harvest of marine resources: should seals and fish be treated differently?
- Implications for the trade ban
- Anti-sealing: who are they?
- Future of sealing in the North Atlantic.

A published report will follow.

The SMC commented that this Tromsø Symposium was originally thought to be limited to Norway and the Russian Federation, but it has become an international event. It is a very interesting forum and it is useful for the collaboration on commercial and scientific interests between the two countries and among the other participants. It is a good platform for understanding the problems of sealing, and for this reason, meetings like this one should be held again in the future.

Statement by KNAPK

A hearing among the local members has resulted in new information on harp seals and reproduction. KNAPK hopes that user knowledge can be used in management of all seals. In particular harbour seal hunting levels are presently very low: the decline in numbers is surely due to some other factor than hunting. The full statement is found as Appendix 4 to the main Council Report in Section 1.1.

9. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

There were no other matters for consideration, and the Chair thanked the Scientific Committee Chair and all participants to the meeting and declared the meeting closed.

The draft report was approved, and the final version was agreed upon by correspondence.