

**Opening Statement by the North Atlantic
Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO)**



NOTE:

**IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO
BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**



NAMMCO - the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission - is pleased to be able to be present as an observer at the 12th meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee.

NAMMCO is an international body for co-operation on the conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. The NAMMCO Agreement was signed in Nuuk, Greenland on 9th April 1992 by Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and focuses on modern approaches to the study of the marine ecosystem as a whole, and to understanding better the role of marine mammals in this system.

NAMMCO provides a mechanism for cooperation on conservation and management for all species of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and pinnipeds (seals and walrus) in the region, many of which have not before been covered by such an international agreement. Through regional cooperation, the member countries of NAMMCO aim to strengthen and further develop effective conservation and management measures for marine mammals. Such measures should be based on the best available scientific evidence, and should take into account both the complexity and vulnerability of the marine ecosystem, and the rights and needs of coastal communities to make a sustainable living from what the sea can provide.

NAMMCO also provides a forum for the exchange of information among member countries on other matters related to marine mammal conservation and management, such as hunting methods and environmental questions.

NAMMCO has implemented the Joint Control Scheme for the Hunting of Marine Mammals which includes international observation of sealing and whaling activities in NAMMCO member countries.

NAMMCO looks forward to productive co-operation with ASCOBANS on matters of mutual interest. Presently these include management of several species of small cetaceans – harbour porpoise, white-sided, white-beaked and bottlenose dolphins; by-catch and fisheries interactions issues; cetacean surveys in the Northeast Atlantic and North Sea (notably exchange of information and planning co-operation on NASS and SCANS-II surveys); environmental factors affecting marine mammals; and ecosystem approaches to conservation and management.

NAMMCO has a Scientific Publications series that focuses on different topics of concern to NAMMCO member countries. These publications include peer-reviewed scientific papers by international experts, and the most recent publication - Volume 5 –*Harbour Porpoises in the North Atlantic*, was the result of an International Symposium on Harbour Porpoises in the North Atlantic that was held in September, 1999. The volume includes 17 contributions on the themes of distribution and stock identity, biological parameters, ecology and pollutants, and abundance, removals and sustainability of removals. Because of the length of time that elapsed between the Symposium and the publication of this volume, all contributions were updated to reflect current findings. NAMMCO considers that the volume extends the efforts already taken by the IWC Scientific Committee and other organisations such as ASCOBANS and ICES, and particularly adds new information from areas poorly covered in previous reports.

NAMMCO held its 14th meeting 1st-3rd March 2005 in Tromsø, Norway. Among issues discussed and decisions taken at the fourteenth meeting that are of interest to ASCOBANS were the following:

Ecosystem-based management - Cooperation through NAMMCO is based firmly on the importance of considering the role of marine mammals in the marine ecosystem and developing multi-species approaches to management. The NAMMCO Scientific Committee is reviewing ongoing work to develop multi-species models suitable for use in management. NAMMCO plans to examine more closely the management objectives and experiences in applying ecosystem based management in countries across the North Atlantic where marine mammals are utilised.

International observation of whaling and sealing - NAMMCO has since 1998 had a fully operational international scheme for the observation of whaling and sealing activities in member countries. At this year's meeting NAMMCO reviewed the implementation of this scheme and noted the valuable experiences gained from having NAMMCO observers active in the field, both land-based and onboard vessels, observing a range of different hunts.

Narwhal and beluga - Having previously expressed its grave concern on the apparent decline of stocks of narwhal and belugas in West Greenland, NAMMCO commended the recent measures taken by the Government of Greenland to reduce catches by implementing quotas for these stocks. There are however, continuing concerns about the sustainability of the catch and the effects of the new management measures will be followed closely.

North Atlantic Sightings Surveys (NASS) - NASS, which are internationally co-ordinated cetacean sightings surveys covering a large area of the Northeast and Central Atlantic, have been conducted in 1987, 1989, 1995 and 2001. Planning is presently underway for another survey in 2007, to be co-ordinated by the NAMMCO Scientific Committee. There are ongoing and positive discussions about the possibility of co-ordinating this survey with the offshore portion of SCANS-II, if that survey is conducted, and with surveys in the Western Atlantic.

By-catch - The Working Group on By-catch conducted a review of the Icelandic by-catch monitoring program, reviewed the quality of by-catch reporting to NAMMCO, and carried out an assessment of the potential for marine mammal by-catch in NAMMCO member countries by looking at the overlap between various fisheries and known distributions of marine mammals.

Assessment of dolphins - At the request of the Council, the Scientific Committee is planning an assessment of white-sided, white-beaked and bottlenose dolphins, to be carried out in 2008, when sufficient information should be available on dolphin distribution and abundance, catches, life history and ecology in NAMMCO member countries.

New General Secretary - NAMMCO welcomed the new General Secretary, Dr Christina Lockyer, who took up her official duties during the 14th Annual Meeting in Tromsø. Dr Lockyer joins existing staff members of the Secretariat, Mr Daniel Pike, Scientific Secretary and Ms Charlotte Winsnes, Administrative Coordinator.

The next annual meeting of NAMMCO will be hosted by Iceland in the spring of 2006.

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