

Northwest Atlantic



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Report of the Seventh Meeting of the North Atlantic
Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO)

by

Delegate of Norway

The Seventh Meeting of the Council of NAMMCO was hosted by the Government of the Faroe Islands and held at Hotel Føroyar in Tórshavn from 27 to 30 May 1997. The meeting was attended by delegations, including fisheries ministers, from the member countries - the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway, as well as observers from the Governments of Canada, Denmark, Japan, and the Russian Federation and representatives of a number of international organizations. The Faroese Minister of Fisheries, Mr. John Petersen, welcomed participants to the meeting, and an invited presentation was given by Chief Tom Happynook, Chairman of the World Council of Whalers and Head Whaling Chief of the Huu-Ay-Aht tribe of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Nation of the North Pacific coast of North America on the establishment and aims of the World Council of Whalers and the whaling traditions of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Nation.

NAFO was represented by Mrs. Lisbeth W. Plassa, Norway, as observer at the Seventh Meeting of NAMMCO.

NAMMCO concluded that the pilot whale hunt in the Faroe Islands is sustainable. The Management Committee of NAMMCO based its conclusion on the Scientific Committee's review of the status of the population in the Central and Northeast Atlantic, which reaffirmed the earlier abundance estimate of 778,000 as the best available.

Not only does this conclusion provide the Faroe Islands with a solid scientific basis for the continued utilization of pilot whales for food, but it also reaffirms NAMMCO's important role in providing management advice, in accordance with Article 65 of the International Convention for the Law of the Sea.

NAMMCO also agreed to begin an exchange of international observers in sealing and whaling activities of member countries in 1998. Such an exchange is provided for in the Joint NAMMCO Control Scheme for the Hunting of Marine Mammals which was adopted by the Council at its last meeting in 1996.

The revised abundance estimate of 72,000 for the Central North Atlantic stock of minke whales, resulting from the Scientific Committee's review of recent sightings data, provides the basis for the Council's request to the Scientific Committee for an assessment of the status of this stock. This assessment, which includes an evaluation of the long-term effects of past and present removals, is currently being carried out by the Scientific Committee.

Having already provided thorough assessments on a number of marine mammal species and stocks as well as questions related to the role of marine mammals in the ecosystem, such as fish consumption by whales and seals, and sealworm infection, the Council requested the Scientific Committee to give priority to the following matters:

- New abundance estimates for harp seals in the Greenland, Barents and White Seas and hooded seals in the Greenland Sea are expected to be available in 1997 and the Scientific Committee's review of new information will provide a basis for further management discussion of these stocks in 1998.
- The harbour porpoise is found in the waters of all NAMMCO member countries and the Scientific Committee was asked to undertake a comprehensive assessment of this species throughout its range.
- The Scientific Committee was asked to provide advice on what scientific studies need to be completed to evaluate the effects of changed levels of removals of ringed seals in West and East Greenland.
- NAMMCO encourages scientific work that leads to a better understanding of interactions between marine mammals and commercially exploited marine resources. It was agreed that special attention should be paid to studies related to competition and the economic aspects of marine mammal-fisheries interactions.

The Council invited Canada and Russia to provide NAMMCO with information on catch levels and management strategies with respect to shared stocks of marine mammals.

The Council noted the health concerns related to high levels of pollution in marine mammals, and agreed to approach relevant international bodies for information on what measures are being taken to reduce emission levels affecting the marine environment.

NAMMCO has established working relations with a number of other intergovernmental organizations dealing with management and conservation issues. NAMMCO had recently provided scientific advice to CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) on a proposal from Norway to transfer the Central and Northeast Atlantic stocks of minke whale from Appendix I to Appendix II.

NAMMCO's plans for a major international Conference on Sealing, with a focus on products and markets, are well under way, and the Council noted with appreciation the invitation from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada to host the Conference in St. John's in November this year.

In 1998, a total of 200,000 NOK has been earmarked for the NAMMCO fund, the purpose of which is to provide support for information projects which contribute to the understanding of the conservation and management of marine mammals.

The Council elected Arnor Halldorsson of Iceland as its new Chairman for the next two years, and Amalie Jessen of Greenland as its Vice-Chairman for the same period.