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IWC/61/OS NAMMCO

North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



Progress Report on Relevant Activities Undertaken within the Framework of CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS to the 61st Meeting of the International Whaling Commission

Funchal, Madeira, Portugal, 22-26 June 2009

I. Introduction

1. The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) continues to build up its coverage and activities on cetaceans and especially small cetaceans. 28 cetacean-related resolutions have been passed by the Parties since the 1st CMS Conference of the Parties in October 1985, addressing issues such as species status and the urgency of conservation action, bycatch, climate change, chemical and noise pollution. Relevant Resolutions passed at the 9th Conference of the Parties in December 2008 are presented in paragraph 15 below.

2. The **CMS** Appendices are one of the functional ways through which CMS addresses the conservation of migratory species. Migratory species or populations threatened with extinction are listed on **Appendix I** of the Convention. Parties are required to protect Appendix I species by conserving and restoring habitats important to them, mitigating obstacles to their migration and curbing factors that might endanger them. 15 cetacean species or populations are currently listed on Appendix I.

3. Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in **Appendix II** of the Convention. For these, the Convention encourages the Range States to conclude global or regional Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding for their conservation. 43 cetacean species or populations are currently listed on Appendix II.

4. CMS agreements (including both legally binding Agreements and the more informal Memoranda of Understanding) now constitute an important regional implementation mechanism for the conservation of cetaceans. These agreements facilitate deeper region-wide cooperation to address issues of shared responsibility including threat reduction, habitat protection and the establishment of migratory corridors, research and monitoring and regional capacity building as well as providing a regional focal point for coordination and cooperation with other regional and global conservation related instruments.

5. Such mechanisms include the two cetacean Agreements **ASCOBANS** (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas) and **ACCOBAMS** (Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Areas), the **Pacific Cetaceans MoU** (Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region) and the latest addition, the **Western African Aquatic Mammal MoU** (Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Conservation of the Manatee and Small Cetaceans of Western

Africa and Macaronesia). This fourth MoU was finalized and signed by 15 governments in Togo in October 2008.

6. Together these agreements and their associated action plans cover the South Pacific, Eastern Atlantic and Macaronesia, and the Baltic, Black, Irish, Mediterranean and North Seas. ACCOBAMS has an independent secretariat based in Monaco with close links to CMS and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Since January 2007 UNEP/CMS has provided the Secretariat to ASCOBANS. UNEP/CMS is the permanent Secretariat to the Pacific Cetaceans MoU working collaboratively with the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), as well as the Western African Aquatic Mammal MoU.

7. CMS is the major global convention undertaking active conservation of **small cetaceans**. As most small cetacean species are migratory and CMS is a UN organization, the convention is ideally positioned to address their conservation in all parts of the world. The approach of CMS to all cetaceans is conservation-oriented, whilst not excluding sustainable use, and actively promoting non-lethal use such as safe wildlife-watching under the Addis Ababa principles adopted under CBD.

8. In July 2000, the heads of the **CMS** and **IWC** Secretariats signed a Memorandum of Understanding outlining in general terms various measures intended to promote and strengthen cooperation and institutional linkages between the two organizations in their respective areas of competence. Among other things the Memorandum of Understanding seeks to ensure mutual participation in meetings of the respective convention bodies and to enhance information exchange and programmatic coordination.

9. The CMS Secretariat and Scientific Council have developed a programme of work to implement CMS **Resolution 8.22** (2005) on Human-induced Impacts on Cetaceans. A review is being undertaken in collaboration with the scientific advisory bodies of CMS cetacean-related Agreements of the extent to which CMS, CMS cetacean-related Agreements and other relevant bodies such as the IWC Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), the United Nations Informal Consultation on Protection of the Oceans and the Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) and the UNEP Regional Seas Programme are addressing a set of human-induced impacts which includes entanglement and by-catch, climate change, ship strikes, pollution, habitat and feeding ground degradation and marine noise. The report aims at identifying points of collaboration and synergies while analysing gaps and overlaps. The timelines for the finalization of these activities have been revised, and the CMS Secretariat will be communicating with the IWC Secretariat shortly

10. Below is a report of activities on cetacean conservation, undertaken by the Convention on Migratory Species, and its two cetacean-related Agreements, namely ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS since the 60th meeting of IWC.

II. Progress report

A. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS)

I. Meeting of the Scientific Council (ScC15)

11. The Scientific Council met for its 15th meeting from 27-28 November 2008 in Rome, Italy. Among other issues, progress in the implementation or follow-up of the cetacean-related resolutions of the 8th Meeting of Parties (2005) was discussed, including: Res.8.14 on Bycatch and Res.8.22 on Adverse human induced impacts on cetaceans. It agreed a new work programme for the Appointed Councillor for Bycatch and a revised schedule for the follow-up of Res.8.22.

12. The Scientific Council adopted the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals*, edited by Perrin, Wursig and Thewissen and published by Academic Press as standard for taxonomic usage for the aquatic mammals. Further, the Council agreed to adopt the nomenclature concordant with the recent split of *Orcaella brevirostris* into *O. brevirostris* and

O. heinsohni. Recognition of the existence of the two species is especially important in that one, *O. brevirostris*, is classified as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List, with several populations listed as Critically Endangered. *O. heinsohni* is classified as Near Threatened; a strong recommendation is made in the Red List assessment that the data needed to clarify its status be collected.

II. Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP9)

13. The 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS took place from 1-5 December 2008 in Rome, Italy. Among other issues, the meeting considered a strategic paper on addressing threats to migratory marine species, from which Res.9.09 was developed. It recognizes that migratory marine species face multiple, cumulative and often synergistic threats with possible effects over vast areas. It gives particular emphasis to potential consequences of climate change with a focus on arctic areas and requests the Scientific Council to seek a closer working relationship also with the IWC.

14. Two other Resolutions directly relevant for cetaceans were passed, namely Res.9.18 on Bycatch and Res.9.19 on Anthropogenic Marine/Ocean Noise. Other Resolutions with a bearing on cetacean-related issues include

15. Several new cetacean species were included on the CMS Appendices. Appendix I lists those species that are critically endangered and which Parties pledge to protect strictly. New listings on Appendix I include *Tursiops truncatus ponticus*, *Orcaella brevirostris* and *Sousa teuszii*, bringing the total number of cetacean species up to 15. Appendix II includes species that require or would considerably benefit from international cooperation. Regional agreements are often concluded for better conservation and management of these species. New listings on Appendix II include the north-west African population of *Phocoena phocoena*, the Mediterranean populations of *Grampus griseus* and *Tursiops truncatus* and the West African population of *Stenella clymene*. With these additions, Appendix II now lists a total of 43 cetacean species or populations.

III. Development of new regional initiatives

16. The Second Meeting of Signatories (MOS2) to the **Pacific Cetaceans MoU** will be held from 28-29 July 2009 in Noumea, New Caledonia. The Whale and Dolphin Action Plan 2008-2012 endorsed by the 18th SPREP meeting in September 2007 is expected to be confirmed also as Action Plan for the MoU. The Pacific Cetaceans MoU invites signatories to reduce threats; respond to strandings and entanglements; and to protect habitat, including migratory corridors. Cooperation, information exchange, education and public awareness activities are also significant components of the Action Plan. Working towards sustainable and responsible cetacean-based tourism is another objective. The meeting will also discuss options for a coordination mechanism for the MoU, making use of synergies with SPREP. There are now 11 Signatories who have agreed to cooperate and reinforce efforts to protect and conserve all cetaceans that occur in the Pacific Islands Region, including their coastal and high seas habitats.

17. The second meeting of the Western African talks on Cetaceans and Their Habitats (WATCH II; 2-3 October 2008, Lomé, Togo) concluded successfully on 3 October with the signature of a new **Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Conservation of the Manatee and Small Cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia**. The agreement, covering a total of 29 range states along the Atlantic Coast of Africa from Morocco to South Africa, as well as offshore waters and the tributary rivers serving as habitat for the manatee, was so far signed by 16 states. It is also formally supported by five non-governmental collaborating organizations. Two separate Action Plans, one on the conservation of the West African manatee and one on small cetaceans, form part of the agreement. They address a wide range of issues and identify key actors and priorities for each action.

IV. Other initiatives

18. The “**Year of the Dolphin 2007/2008**” (YoD) was the major outreach campaign of CMS and its cetacean-related agreements, which was originally planned for 2007 and then extended to 2008. CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS have formed a multi-stakeholder partnership with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDSCS) and the multinational travel and tourism company TUI. Worldwide, more than 40 official supporters were accepted. These supporters were and are active in research and conservation projects, awareness raising, fundraising, public events, publications, media and lectures.



19. Several governments have supported the YoD in form of voluntary contributions and other funding, distribution of information material or provision of dedicated websites. Activities such as public awareness raising among local communities and tourists, publications on the YoD, educational activities in schools, public events, research and dolphin conservation or launches were initiated in many countries in both the developing and the developed world.

20. The objectives for YoD, as presented to the CMS Standing Committee in September 2006, were to:

- Increase general awareness in developed countries on dolphin conservation
- Provide coastal communities in developing countries with educational material on dolphin conservation
- Provide effective educational tools and information for children and their teachers on dolphin conservation, available on line
- Increase awareness and commitment of world governments on dolphin conservation, also with a view to national marine conservation agendas and plans
- Create partnerships and stimulate further action amongst non-governmental organizations dealing with marine conservation and support their advocacy role
- Directly involve a private business in a public awareness and conservation campaign, showing how UN objectives can be supported by and benefit private sector companies as well
- Increase environmental awareness in businesses
- Allow relevant conservation MEAs (Multilateral Environmental Agreements) to better fulfil their outreach and information mandate by reaching out to a broader audience
- Bridge the communication gap among private sector, UN agencies and non-governmental organization, by providing a common platform for joint activities and common goals
- Raise new and additional resources for dolphin conservation

21. A detailed report on how these objectives were met was prepared by the CMS Secretariat for the 9th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (UNEP/CMS/Conf.9.21, downloadable from http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/cop9_meeting_docs.htm).

22. In summary, for the first time communication and synergies between the corporate sector, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations were promoted on a wider scale in the CMS Family of Agreements, thus providing a common platform for joint activities and common goals. Educational bodies and academia were also involved in some of the YoD's events. Numerous NGOs and dedicated individuals were involved in the campaign, distributing educational material, organising beach clean-ups, and holding lectures at schools, to name only a few activities. More information on these activities can be found on http://www.yod2007.org/en/Start_page/index.html.

23. As further success indicators references in the media, the educational impact on tourists, schools and in developing countries generally, participation by interested organizations and individuals and conservation activities can be identified. The launch of the campaign was featured in more than 100 international media. YoD events received coverage in the form of press releases and television reporting in numerous countries, thus increasing awareness of dolphin conservation. Several press releases were distributed through the UNEP media list of European journalists and also featured on the UNEP website.

B. Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (UNEP/ASCOBANS)

24. The 5th Meeting of the Parties in December 2006 had decided that for the period January 2007 to December 2009, the **UNEP/ASCOBANS Secretariat** would be merged with the UNEP/CMS Secretariat on a trial basis. Accordingly, the Executive Secretary of CMS currently serves as Acting Executive Secretary of ASCOBANS. However, the Agreement continues to be an independent and legally binding instrument, holding its own meetings and managing its own financial resources. The new arrangements have been reviewed in a UNEP-led evaluation in late-2008 and the ASCOBANS MOP6 in September 2009 will decide whether the arrangement will continue.

I. Status of ratifications / Agreement Area extension

25. An extension of the ASCOBANS Agreement area south-westwards entered into force on 3 February 2008. The official title of the Agreement thereby, for those countries that accepted the amendment, changed from Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas to **Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**. The acronym stays unchanged. Five of the ten Parties to ASCOBANS have already ratified the Amendment, and others are in advanced stages of the ratification process.

II. Institutional bodies

26. The 16th Meeting of the ASCOBANS **Advisory Committee** was held in Bruges, Belgium (20-24 April 2009). The AC endorsed the revised Jastarnia Plan as well as the final draft of a Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea, both of which will be proposed for adoption at the 6th Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS. The Committee also debated threats to cetaceans such as bycatch, pollution, underwater sound or disturbance; information on population size, distribution and structure; ongoing research and further research priorities; marine protected areas; outreach activities of Parties, the Secretariat and partners, including a decision on the winner of the 3rd ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award; the possible inclusion of all cetacean species occurring in the ASCOBANS region under the Agreement and relations with other bodies. The meeting also made strategic considerations for the future of the Agreement, which will be decided upon at the upcoming MOP6. The report of the meeting will be available shortly from the ASCOBANS website www.ascobans.org.

27. The **6th Meeting of the Parties** will be held at the UN Campus in Bonn, Germany, from 16-18 September 2009. The invitation and registration form can be downloaded from www.ascobans.org. More information and meeting documentations will be offered for download shortly.

III. Implementation of the work programme 2008-2009

28. The **Triennial Work Plan** adopted by MOP 5 (2006) covers all areas of the Agreement's work, as laid out in the Conservation and Management Plan: a) Habitat conservation and management; b) Surveys and research; c) Use of bycatches and strandings; d) Legislation; c) Information and education. A review of progress in the implementation and necessary next steps for each activity is annexed to the Report of AC16 (Annex 12). The following points highlight some issues of particular interest to the IWC:

29. In February 2009, the Fifth Meeting of the ASCOBANS **Jastarnia Group** was held in Turku, Finland. Established in 2003 to carry forward the Agreement's Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan), this Working Group each year makes recommendations to the Advisory Committee of the Agreement. The Group also finalised a revised version of the Jastarnia Plan, which was forwarded to the Advisory Committee. The next meeting of the Group

is scheduled to take place in Poland in early 2010.

30. The **Intersessional Working Group on the Assessment of Acoustic Disturbance** will shortly submit advice to the Parties on the management of three main human activities: use of sonar, seismic surveys and pile-driving. For each of these subjects, the working group was asked to examine the management (e.g. impact mitigation) of the activities with regard to noise; summarise the assessments that have been made; indicate the main concerns relevant to the ASCOBANS objectives; and identify or prepare guidelines or recommendations for best practice.

31. The 16th Meeting of the Advisory Committee also established a small working group to provide advice to the ASCOBANS Parties regarding the possible **inclusion of all cetacean species** occurring in the Agreement Area under the treaty. The working group produced a list of pros and cons (Annex 19 of AC16 Report). This document will be further refined before submission to the MOP.

32. The proceedings of two workshops held in October 2007 on **Small Cetacean Population Structure in the ASCOBANS Area** have been published on the ASCOBANS website. The publication includes also the results of extensive work conducted in follow-up of the workshops, leading to recommendations on population differentiation and possible management units for five species: harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, white-beaked dolphin, Atlantic white-sided dolphin and short-beaked common dolphin.

33. Savings made on the ASCOBANS Trust Fund were redirected to the support of **conservation projects**. Based on prioritisation done by the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat is able to conclude funding agreements for research projects with a direct significance towards supporting the goals of the Agreement. So far, a project on an analysis of the risk of ship strikes, which will consider both AIS shipping and cetacean distribution data, as well as a study on the effects of contaminants on reproduction in small cetaceans have been supported. The recent AC meeting identified a further five projects for support through ASCOBANS, e.g. covering the investigation of population structure and management units for *Lagenorhynchus acutus*, an analysis of contaminant in samples from Baltic harbour porpoises and the production of a review of stranding trends.

C. Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS)

I. Status of Ratification

34. As of May 1st 2009, there are 21 State Parties to the Agreement; Montenegro will become a Party on August 1st 2009.

35. The Executive Secretary met with the Egyptian State Minister for the Environment, General Maged George Elias GHATAS, who confirmed the wish of his Country to ratify ACCOBAMS' Agreement. All the concerned Egyptian Ministries agree upon the upcoming ratification. The administrative requirements are in process.

II. Main activities developed between May 2008 and May 2009

a. Fisheries:

36. **International Workshop on bycatch in the ACCOBAMS Area (ByCBAMS) September 2008, Rome:** Considering the interactions between the fishing sector and the conservation of cetaceans, and according to the recommendations of the Parties, the Secretariat established close coordination with the Secretariat of GFCM and developed a series of collaboration. In 2008, the Secretariat attended the relevant meetings of GFCM and convened, jointly with the Secretariat of GFCM, two back-to-back workshops on the issue of bycatch. The workshops were organized in the premises of the FAO in Rome from 15 to 18 September 2008 and were attended by 29 Experts from 10 countries, as well as from the GFCM Secretariat, the

ACCOBAMS Secretariat and NGOs. During these workshops the experts assessed the status of bycatch based on national reports presented by experts. The assessment included the evaluation of existing information on endangered species mortality induced by fishing. The efficiency of the existing techniques and devices for avoiding or reducing the incidental catches of endangered species was also discussed during the workshops. During the workshops, the experts recommended to promote the collection of data about bycatch of endangered species using a standard methodology and Format. They recommended using the Format prepared within the framework of the BYCBAMS Project and adapting it to cover other threatened species. They also recommended to further develop the GFCM Information System to include detailed information on bycatch. A draft protocol for data collection on cetacean bycatch and depredation will be used for other species concerned by the same type of problem. The "Task 1" Database elaborated within the GFCM will be extended in order to collect data relative to incidental catches.

b. Cooperation between developed and developing States:

37. Tunisia and Morocco: Project on cetacean Bycatch evaluation, raising fishermen awareness, and pilot project related to the use of acoustic devices to mitigate Bycatch in collaboration with Italian and Spanish ACCOBAMS Experts.
- Lebanon: Assessment and monitoring of cetacean populations along Lebanese coasts and organization of training sessions on cetacean photo-identification starting in September 2009.
 - Collaboration with the RAC/SPA for the development of National Action Plans for the conservation of cetacean populations in Lebanon and Tunisia.
 - Development of a national network for monitoring the Black Sea cetaceans (stranded and by-caught) in Bulgaria and Romania, and identifying relevant measures for mitigating the adverse impact of fisheries. The project aims to establish operative mechanism for collecting regular (systematic) information in the Bulgarian and Romanian Black Sea area on cetaceans stranded alive, found dead on the coast or entangled in fishing gear, and outline measures for preventing cases of increased mortality.

c. Underwater noise issue:

38. During their last meeting (October 2007), ACCOBAMS Contracting Parties have agreed on the appropriate tools for assessing the impacts of underwater noise on cetaceans in order to establish mitigation measures to reduce these impacts and a Set of Guidelines which will guide Governments in the application of such measures. A Working Group composed by France, Italy, Spain and paired with the Oskar Convention, the WDCS and the NRDC is currently developing the Guidelines which will be presented to ACCOBAMS Contracting Parties by the end of 2010 for adoption.

d. Collisions between ships and large whales:

39. The Ministero della Tutela del Territorio e del Mare of Italy supported a project on cetacean collisions mitigation. This project is aimed to:

- 1/ Document mortality from ship strikes to obtain reliable estimates of rates of human caused removals and generate a database for analysis;
- 2/ to map the temporal and geographic distribution and abundance of large cetaceans in relationship to similar information on vessel traffic to identify potential higher risk areas.

40. ACCOBAMS will get the status of permanent observer within the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to develop collaboration on the collision issue.

e. The REPCET Project:

41. Established under the auspices of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and the PELAGOS Sanctuary Secretariat, this project aimed to mitigate the collisions impact of cetaceans with vessels. A network, including different research institutes and concerned shipping companies, and a central database on ship strikes to facilitate information exchanges and data sharing and to apply and test the suggested mitigation measures, will be established.

f. Joint IWC-ACCOBAMS workshop on reducing risk of collisions between vessels and cetaceans:

42. In the last couple of years, the IWC Scientific Committee has been developing a centralised database on ship strikes with cetaceans. The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee has agreed to participate in the process. The objective of developing such a global database was to obtain reliable data to contribute towards an objective assessment of the extent of the problem at the population level in order to: better understand factors that contribute to ship strikes; and thus to be able to prioritise mitigation measures and regions. The purpose of the Workshop is to bring together the various stakeholders (including scientists, technicians, ship owners, regulators, etc.) that will be involved in developing and implementing successful mitigation measures. Mitigation can be addressed through a series of approaches: technical (detection), regulatory (national and international measures, including reporting, vessel speed, shipping lanes, etc.) and informative/educational (awareness raising and crew training). While many of the issues discussed at the workshop will be of broad application, it will be valuable to choose some areas as case studies. It is proposed to focus on the Mediterranean Sea and the Canary Islands given the amount of data and information already available for these regions.

g. The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative:

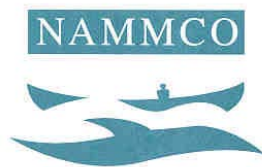
43. The project was finalized: its aim is to obtain baseline population estimates (stock structure and abundance) and distributional information of cetaceans within the ACCOBAMS area. Including actions related to management tools, capacity building and public awareness.

h. Marine Protected Areas:

44. During the last MOP (October 2007) the Parties adopted criteria for the selection of MPAs for cetaceans and a special format for cetacean MPA proposals, and made recommendations concerning sites in the Agreement area known to contain important cetacean habitats. A map, presenting the existing and potential areas of importance for cetaceans, was widely distributed in the international forum. ACCOBAMS is a Partner of the Steering Committee on the project "identification of SPAMIs in the Mediterranean areas beyond national jurisdiction" developed by the RAC/SPA thanks to the support of EU.

i. ACCOBAMS' Partners:

45. Three additional Institutes have become ACCOBAMS Partners: The Turkish Marine Research Foundation, The écoOcéan Institute and the Bottlenose Dolphin Research Institute.



OPENING STATEMENT

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) is pleased to present an opening statement with items of relevance and interest to the IWC and the attending delegations on the occasion of the 61st Annual Meeting of the IWC, held in Madeira, and hosted by Portugal, 22-26 June 2009. As on previous occasions, NAMMCO wishes the IWC a productive meeting.

Regional management of whales and seals in the North Atlantic

The Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, 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 walrus in the North Atlantic, which held its 17th Annual Council Meeting, 2 -4 September 2008 in Sisimiut, 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, seals and walrus in the region.

Whaling and sealing nations in the North Atlantic, together with observers from Canada, Denmark, Japan and the Russian Federation, at this meeting 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.

In the light of interest expressed by Greenland in resuming a catch of humpback whales in its waters, the Management Committee for Cetaceans 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 (T-NASS) 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 (SNESSA) and in European waters (CODA). 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. This has culminated in a Scientific Working Group meeting, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, 15 – 17 April 2009 to discuss progress in ecosystem and multi-species modelling as a tool in management of marine mammals. The report from this meeting will be discussed at the forthcoming Council meeting in Tromsø, Norway in September 2009.

Sealing was also a major focus of last year's NAMMCO meeting. The Commission requested a special meeting of experts to assess best practices in different forms of seal hunting, and this meeting was held 24 – 26 February 2009. The report from this meeting is available on the website www.nammco.no. 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.

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. The report is available on the website www.nammco.no.

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. Two new volumes are due to be published in 2009: volume 7 on the North Atlantic Sightings Surveys, and volume 8 on Harbour Seals.

The former Chair of the NAMMCO Council, Kate Sanderson from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Faroe Islands, concluded her term of office with a statement: “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 (Norway) was elected as the new Chair of the NAMMCO Council, but recently resigned because of reappointment to another ministerial department. The Vice Chair, Ásta Einarsdóttir (Iceland) is currently acting Chair.

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