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NORWAY – ADDRESS OF WELCOME

Ambassador Odd Gunnar Skagestad, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Madam Chairman, Delegates, Observers and Guests, Dear Friends.

On behalf of the Norwegian Government, I have the honour and pleasure to welcome you to Norway to this tenth meeting of the Council of NAMMCO. I believe it is no accident, but rather most appropriate that we meet here in Sandefjord, a city noted above all for its strong traditions in the history of the whaling industry. And on a personal note, I find it particularly pleasant to be back in the NAMMCO business after a long period of absence, stretching almost back to the 9 April 1992, when at the Nuuk meeting some of us, including certain individuals who are present here today, spent the whole night negotiating the final text of the NAMMCO Agreement.

Norway continues to attach great importance to the work of NAMMCO and the cooperation between the North Atlantic countries. In a narrow, but nevertheless important, sense, our aim is to defend the culture and interests of the coastal people in our part of the world. In the broader sense, NAMMCO also forms part – on the regional level - of the comprehensive regime structure of international cooperation on environment conservation and resource management that started with the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. Since the 1970's, this regime structure has grown to include such basic and broad-scale agreements as the 1973 CITES agreement, the 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention, the Agenda 21 of the 1992 UNCED Conference and the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity – all of which firmly established and entrenched the twin principles of conservation and sustainable use of nature's resources.

These two objectives are actually two aspects of the same issue: Without sustainable use, conservation for its own sake makes little sense.

Although these principles are otherwise universally accepted, powerful forces have long claimed an arbitrary exception with regard to marine mammals, and whales in particular.

NAMMCO cannot aspire to a global role on this issue, but it certainly can – and should – be a voice of sanity and reason and uphold, in the regional context, the main principles which are embodied in the broad international agreements and instruments which I just mentioned.

It has been noted – time and again – that NAMMCO is a *young* organization. Indeed, it still is, but during its eight years of existence NAMMCO has matured into a well-established and highly respected creature, well on its way to developing into a serious management organization. Notably, and as was pointed out in our Opening Statement to last year's Council meeting, NAMMCO has embarked upon work that other management organizations are incapable of because of lack of political will to stick to the principle of sustainable harvesting of the natural resources of the sea.

The foundation for the success of NAMMCO is the work of its Scientific Committee. We congratulate the Scientific Committee on the consistently high standards of its work, and look forward to see the results of its current and future tasks, as assigned by the Council. At the same time, we would also like to encourage a stronger international participation and involvement with the Scientific Committee by persons from other than member countries, so as to broaden the base of its work and further enhance its quality and reputation.

The question of a Host Agreement between Norway and NAMMCO has been discussed for a long time. I am pleased to be able to announce that the matter has now been finalized and that the Agreement is ready to be signed at the present meeting. If all goes as planned, this task will be performed by our Minister of Fisheries, Mr. Otto Gregussen, who will be with us at this evening's reception.

I am furthermore truly pleased to note that this year's Council meeting will include a presentation by a most distinguished guest, Dr. Ray Gambell OBE. Dr. Gambell has recently left the International Whaling Commission (IWC) after 24 years' tenure as the IWC's Secretary, - an assignment which he performed with the highest standards of professionalism, impartiality and integrity. Ray, I wish you a very warm welcome to Norway!

We would also like to welcome the observers to the NAMMCO meeting. We appreciate the support you give us. We believe that it is in our mutual interest to further the development of

NAMMCO's cooperation with interested states and relevant organizations – whether they are IGOs, NGOs or scientific bodies.

Madam Chairman, distinguished Participants: We hope you will enjoy your stay in Norway, and that the surroundings here in Sandefjord will be optimally conducive to the constructive handling of the serious and important work that lies ahead of us. We look forward to fruitful discussions and decisions in the Council, hopefully continuing to build NAMMCO as an organization that, true to the principle of sustainable use, takes care of the needs of the coastal communities of the North Atlantic.