

**Report by NAFO Observer (Odd Gunnar Skagestad – Norway)
on 17th Council Meeting of NAMMCO**

**Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) - 30th Annual Meeting,
Vigo, 22-26 September 2008.**

The 17th Council Meeting of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission took place at Sisimiut, Greenland, during 1-4 September 2008. In addition to delegates from the member countries, viz. the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway, the meeting was attended by observers from, *inter alia*, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Russia, IWC, NEAFC and NAFO (represented by the undersigned on behalf of Norway), as well as various NGO's such as the ICC and the High North Alliance.

In summing up the meeting and concluding her term as Chairperson of the NAMMCO Council, Ms. Kate Sanderson from the Faroe Islands made the following observations: “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”.

Mr. Halvard P. Johansen from Norway was elected as the new Chairperson of the NAMMCO Council.

NAMMCO has gradually established good relationships of cooperation with a wide range of international organizations, and appears now to be ready to undertake more extensive management tasks. For the first time, the question of setting catch quotas for large (baleen) whales was a theme at a NAMMCO meeting. The reluctance which previously has been observed with regard to making active use of NAMMCO as a management organization, is now considerably less noticeable. This may be ascribed to the negative developments in recent years in the IWC, including the inability of the IWC to set a quota of humpback whales for Greenland in spite of solid scientific advice. Thus, Greenland informed that it may take steps to leave the IWC and to correspondingly strengthen the prerogatives of NAMMCO as a management body also for the large whales. In the light of interest expressed by Greenland in resuming a catch of humpback whales in its waters, the Cetacean Management Committee of NAMMCO recommended that the total quota of humpbacks in West Greenland in 2009,

including by-catches, should not exceed 10 animals. Echoing a predominant view, Norway emphasized that it is now important that the NAMMCO Scientific Committee starts to study general models for conservation and management of baleen whales.

Sealing was also a major focus of this year's NAMMCO meeting. The Commission has requested a special meeting of experts to assess best practices in different forms of seal hunting.

Although NAMMCO does not deal formally with trade issues, moves within the European Union towards imposing trade bans on seal products prompted all member countries at the NAMMCO meeting to express their serious concern about the implications such trade barriers can have for the responsible management and sustainable use of abundant seal stocks across the North Atlantic, and the economies of the many communities dependent on these resources.

The next NAMMCO Council Meeting will take place in Norway during the first week of September, 2009.

For further details, reference is made to the NAMMCO Secretariat's Press Release of 4 September 2008 (copy enclosed).

Odd Gunnar Skagestad.