

Annex E

Report of the Sub-Committee on Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling

Members: Walløe (Convenor): Allison, Aoki, Butterworth, Charlton, de Moor, Debrah, Doniol-Valcroze, Donovan, Ferriss, Fujise, Gallego, Givens, Gonzalez, Goodman, Hakamada, Haug, Holm, Hosoda, Hubbell, Iñiguez, Kim, Kinya, Kitakado, Lang, Lee, Lent, Litovka, Lundquist, Mallette, Morishita, Moronuki, Mwabili, Nelson, Nio, Punt, Reeves, Ritter, Robbins, Santos, Simmonds, Smith, Stachowitsch, Suydam, Suzuki, Svoboda, Tandy, Tiedemann, Walters, Weinrich, Weller, Wilberg, Witting, Zerbin.

1. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1.1 Opening remarks

Walløe welcomed members to the new sub-committee.

1.2 Election of Chair

Walløe was elected Chair.

1.3 Appointment of Rapporteurs

Weller was appointed as rapporteur.

1.4 Introductory remarks about recent changes to the Schedule

As part of this introduction, the Chair reviewed modifications that were made to the provisions for aboriginal subsistence whaling at the 67th meeting of the International Whaling Commission in 2018 and the necessary updates to the Schedule of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling with regards to aboriginal subsistence whaling. Several of the underpinning scientific components of ASW (and AWS) were also discussed, including: *SLAs* (case specific), operational rules (generic to the extent possible), carryover, block quotas, interim relief allocation, and guidelines for Implementation Reviews and abundance estimation as well as other data. Definitions of these components are detailed in appendix 6 of IWC/67/Rep/02¹. Amongst other things, the sub-committee was made aware that the aforementioned amendments to the Schedule (IWC, 2018) bring forth the following provisions with respect to catch limits.

‘Commencing in 2026, and provided the appropriate Strike Limit Algorithm has been developed by then, strike/catch limits (including any carry forward provisions) for each stock identified in sub-paragraph 13(b) shall be extended every six years, provided: (a) the Scientific Committee advises in 2024, and every six years thereafter, that such limits will not harm that stock; (b) the Commission does not receive a request from an ASW country relying on the stock (‘relevant ASW country’), for a change in the relevant catch limits based on need; and (c) the Commission determines that the relevant ASW country has complied with the approved timeline and that the information provided represents a status quo continuation of the hunt.’

‘The provisions for each stock identified in sub-paragraph 13(b), especially the provisions for carryover, shall be reviewed by the Commission in light of the advice of the Scientific Committee.’

With regard to the work of the ASW sub-committee, while the amendments above eliminate the necessity for annual management advice to be given, the Scientific Committee will continue to review management advice in the context of

regular, and if necessary, a special *Implementation Review*. Furthermore, management advice is now to be given one year in advance of the final year of a quota block. For example, the final year of the current block is 2025 so advice from the Scientific Committee would be needed no later than 2024.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The Agenda was adopted. See Appendix 1.

3. REVIEW OF AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

Documents available included: SC/68A/ASW/01-03 and SC/68A/ASW/05.

4. BOWHEAD WHALES

4.1 Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort (B-C-B) Seas bowhead whales

4.1.1 New scientific information

The last successful abundance survey for Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort seas bowhead whales was conducted in 2011. In order to have a new estimate available by 2021 (as agreed by the Scientific Committee), two surveys summarised in SC/68A/ASW/05 are planned for 2019: (1) an ice-based count in spring 2019 near Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow); and (2) an aerial line-transect survey across the US and Canada Beaufort Sea in summer 2019. The visual estimate from the ice-based survey in 2019 will be corrected with acoustic data collected from previous efforts. In the past, this type of survey has provided very precise estimates and is preferred by the Scientific Committee, but the survey is more challenging and less safe than in the past because of thinner and less stable ice conditions due to climate change. Therefore, an aerial line-transect survey is going to be attempted to increase the chances of having a new estimate by 2021. If successful, a line-transect survey could be implemented periodically in the future, if other methods fail. Ideally, both surveys will be successful in 2019, which would allow a comparison between the abundance estimates and confidence intervals resulting from the two survey approaches.

In discussion of this paper, the sub-committee was reminded that specific technical advice on the aerial survey had been provided at SC/67b by the ASI sub-committee (IWC, 2019a) and that those suggestions had subsequently been incorporated into the design and implementation of the 2019 survey.

4.1.2 Catch information

SC/68A/ASW/02 presented a summary of harvest data from the aboriginal hunt for bowhead whales in Alaska. In 2018, 68 bowhead whales were struck resulting in 47 animals landed. Total landed for the hunt in 2018 was higher than the average over the past 10 years (2008-17: mean of landed=42.6; SD=7.2). Efficiency (no. landed/no. struck) in 2018 was 69%, which was lower than the average for the past 10 years (mean of efficiency=77.4%; SD=6.6%). Of the landed whales, 23 were females and 24 were males. Based on total length (>13.7m in length), seven females were presumed mature. Three of those animals were examined. Two were pregnant, one with a term foetus (4.3m), another

¹Available at: <https://archive.iwc.int/?r=7309>.

with a small foetus (4.5cm), and the third female was lactating. In total, 347 strikes were used during the block quota of 2013-18 resulting in 271 bowheads landed. The 2013-18 quota allowed for 336 whales landed using 402 strikes (not including possible carryover). Genetic samples were collected from 35 whales landed in 2018 and nine that were satellite-tagged and biopsied.

It was noted that a lactating female was taken and it was asked if a calf was observed in the vicinity at the time she was killed. Suydam indicated that his understanding of this event was that no calf was observed near this adult female and that it was likely that her calf of the year had been recently weaned.

No bowhead whales were harvested by the indigenous people of Chukotka in 2018 (SC/68A/ASW/03).

4.1.3 Bycatch information

No information was provided.

4.2 Eastern Canada/West Greenland bowhead whales

4.2.1 New scientific information

Fifty biopsies were obtained from bowhead whales in Disko Bay in 2018.

4.2.2 Catch information

SC/68A/ASW/01 provides an update of recent Canadian takes from the Inuit subsistence harvest of Eastern Canada-West Greenland bowhead whales. In the eastern Canadian Arctic, the maximum take is seven bowhead whales per year, with no carryover of unused takes between years. Since 2015, eight whales were struck (two in 2015, two in 2016, one in 2017 and three in 2018) and seven were successfully landed, all females.

It was asked if DNA samples were being collected and where they were stored. Doniol-Valcroze replied that DNA samples were routinely collected and stored at the DFO facility in Winnipeg.

The sub-committee express its **great appreciation** to Canada for providing this report and sending an expert (Doniol-Valcroze) to the meeting.

ASW catches of bowhead whales in 2018 off West Greenland was 0, with no struck and lost.

4.2.3 Bycatch information

No information was provided.

5. NORTH PACIFIC GRAY WHALES

5.1 New scientific information

New information on gray whales in the eastern and western North Pacific was presented in the CMP sub-committee in papers: SC/68A/CMP/02, SC/68A/CMP/04, SC/68A/CMP/11-14, SC/68A/CMP/16 and SC/68A/CMP/21.

5.2 Catch information

SC/68A/ASW/03 presented summary information on the ASW gray whale hunt off Chukotka, Russia. During the 2018 hunting season, 106 whales (58 males and 48 females, including one 'stinky' whale used for food) were landed and one whale was struck and lost. The majority of whales (42%) were taken by native hunters of Lorino village. Mean body length of gray whales taken off Chukotka was 9.7m with a mean body weight 10.3t. The largest whale killed, taken in Neshkan village, was a 14.1m female weighing 29.7t. The smallest whale killed, taken near Novoye Chaplino village, was a 7m female weighing 5.2t. This whale was

not accompanied by a large whale and there was no sign of milk in its stomach. None of the females killed were lactating; 12 whales landed had various injuries and traumas mainly caused by killer whale attacks. Overall mean blubber thickness was measured at 115mm. For the 2013-18 six-year quota block, a total of 716 gray whales were landed, three of them were 'stinky'. All whaling products were used for local subsistence purposes only.

It was confirmed that DNA samples are being routinely collected and archived by the whalers in Chukotka. The sub-committee **reiterated** the AWMP sub-committee statement at SC/67b (IWC, 2019b) with regard to collecting both genetic and photo-identification data from the hunt as these would be particularly useful in testing stock structure hypotheses.

Finally, the sub-committee noted that only three 'stinky' whales were taken during the 2013-18 period and it was asked if this represents a general decline in the presence of 'stinky' whales or if the hunters had merely become better at detecting such whales when approaching them and, in turn, avoiding them. Litovka indicated that while some uncertainty about this question persists, the prevalence of 'stinky' whales did appear to be declining in general.

Attention: SC

The sub-committee **reiterates** previous advice that genetic samples and photographic data for gray whales be collected and combined to better assess stock structure-related questions.

A male gray whale was harvested in Alaska in 2018. The take of this whale will be reported as an infraction to the IWC (see SC/68A/ASW/02).

5.3 Bycatch information

No information was reported.

6. COMMON MINKE WHALES

6.1 Common minke whales off East Greenland

6.1.1 New scientific information

No new information was reported to the sub-committee.

6.1.2 Catch information

Aboriginal subsistence whaling catches of minke whales in 2018 off East Greenland totalled two, including one male and one female, and none struck and lost. Skin samples for genetic analysis were obtained from three common minke whales in East Greenland.

6.1.3 Bycatch information

One common minke whale of unknown sex was bycaught in pelagic (mackerel) trawling gear in August 2018.

6.2 Common minke whales off West Greenland

6.2.1 New scientific information

No new information was reported to the sub-committee.

6.2.2 Catch information

Aboriginal subsistence whaling catches of minke whales in 2018 off West Greenland totalled 112 landed, including 21 males and 91 females, and four struck and lost. Skin samples were obtained from 103 of 112 landed whales.

6.2.3 Bycatch information

No information was reported.

7. FIN WHALES OFF WEST GREENLAND

7.1 New scientific information

No new information was reported to the sub-committee.

7.2 Catch information

Aboriginal subsistence whaling catches of fin whales in 2018 off West Greenland totalled six landed, including three males and three females, and one struck and lost. Four skin samples were collected.

7.3 Bycatch information

No information was reported.

8. HUMPBACK WHALES

8.1 Humpback whales off West Greenland

8.1.1 New scientific information

No new information was reported to the sub-committee.

8.1.2 Catch information

Aboriginal subsistence whaling catches of humpback whales in 2018 off West Greenland totalled six landed, including one male and five females, and none struck and lost. Skin samples were obtained from all of the whales landed.

8.1.3 Bycatch information

Three humpback whales were reported as bycatch. One was dead, one was euthanised in East Greenland and one was euthanised in West Greenland.

8.2 Humpback whales off St. Vincent and The Grenadines

8.2.1 New scientific information

No new information was reported to the sub-committee.

8.2.2 Catch information

No humpback whales were taken off St. Vincent and The Grenadines in 2018.

8.2.3 Bycatch information

No information was provided.

9. WORK PLAN

The work plan for 2020 is to receive and discuss new biological information and catch information on species and stocks subject to aboriginal subsistence whaling.

REFERENCES

- International Whaling Commission. 2018. Chair's Report of the 67th IWC Meeting. Annex P. Amendments to the Schedule Adopted at the 67th Meeting. [Available at: <https://archive.iwc.int/?r=7592>].
- International Whaling Commission. 2019a. Report of the Scientific Committee. Annex E. Report of the Standing Working Group on Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Management Procedures. *J. Cetacean Res. Manage. (Suppl.)* 20:120-82.
- International Whaling Commission. 2019b. Report of the Scientific Committee. Annex Q. Report of the Standing Working Group on Abundance Estimates, Status of Stocks and International Cruises *J. Cetacean Res. Manage. (Suppl.)* 20:394-412.

Appendix 1

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