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Information requested by the US Department of the Interior regarding recent biological data about Atlantic walrus in Greenland

As CITES Scientific Authority of Greenland, the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR) has been asked for help addressing the US request of information about biological data newly available regarding Atlantic walrus in Greenland.

Atlantic walrus in Greenland were assessed by a working group under the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) in December 2009 (NAMMCO 2011). GINR used the results of this assessment and information about management and trade to update a Non Detriment Finding report (NDF) in 2011 (GINR 2011). The updated NDF concluded that the 3 populations of Atlantic walrus present in Greenland are managed in such a way that their numbers are likely to increase. It was therefore concluded that the export of products derived from Atlantic walrus from Greenland is not detrimental to any population of this species.

The two populations that West Greenland shares with Canada/Nunavut (Davis Strait/Hudson Bay and Northern Baffin Bay) are smaller than their historical numbers and are still recovering from previous hunting. The East Greenland population seems to have recovered to a large extent from previous hunting and is approaching pre-exploitation levels.

Studies carried out by the GINR after the NAMMCO assessment from November 2009 include:

1. An aerial survey in the North Water Polynia, Northern Baffin Bay in May-June 2010
2. An aerial survey in the Davis Strait and the south-eastern Baffin Bay in April 2012,
3. Satellite tagging in Northern Baffin Bay in May-June 2010, 2011 and 2012
4. An interview survey of walrus hunters in West Greenland in 2010
5. Biopsy sampling and satellite tracking in Northeast Greenland in 2010 and 2011

The results of the aerial survey in 2010 were analysed together with a similar survey carried out in 2009 and corrected for availability bias (animals out of sight while diving) with data from the satellite tags (Heide-Jorgensen et al. *In press*). A new estimated abundance of 1499 (1077-2087) in the Northern Baffin Bay population is slightly higher than the estimate used by the NAMMCO assessment, which was based only on the 2009 survey.

Results of the other studies mentioned above are still under analyses.

It should be noticed that the Atlantic walrus is listed in the Greenland Red List (Boertmann 2007) as critically endangered (Northern Baffin Bay), endangered (Davis Strait/Hudson Bay) and vulnerable (East Greenland). These statuses were granted using the cautionary principle in the face of conditions prior to 2006, when the available data was scarce and the catches were unregulated. If the Greenland Red List was to be updated today, Atlantic walrus would receive a more favourable status. The Government of Greenland introduced quotas in 2006 and during 2006-2011 GINR collaborated with the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the National Environmental Research Institute from Denmark to clarify the stock structure and estimate the abundance of all 3 populations of Atlantic walrus in Greenland. This work was supported by the Danish Ministry of Environment and the Government of Greenland.

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CITES Scientific Authority

References

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- GINR. 2011. Standing Non-detriment Findings for exports from Greenland of products derived from Atlantic walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus rosmarus*). 15. Greenland Institute of Natural Resources.
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- NAMMCO. 2011. Report of the NAMMCO Scientific Committee working group on walrus - stock status of walrus in Greenland and adjacent seas In *NAMMCO Annual Report 2010 - Annex 2*, 330 - 358. North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission.