

## *International meetings*

# **Participation of scientists from the Institute of Cetacean Research in International Meetings in 2025**

### **Annual Meeting of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) Scientific Committee (SC)**

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) is an international body for cooperation on the conservation, management and study of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. The NAMMCO Agreement was signed in Nuuk, Greenland on 9 April 1992 by Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and entered into force on 8 July 1992. The agreement focuses on modern approaches to the study of the marine ecosystem, and to better understanding the role of marine mammals in the ecosystem. NAMMCO has a Scientific Committee (SC), which meets annually.

The 2025 NAMMCO SC Meeting (SC31) was held from 21 to 24 January in Tromsø, Norway. Three scientists from the Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) participated in the meeting (Pastene, Konishi and Murata) as observers from Japan. They presented the following documents: 1) the 2023–2024 Japan progress report on large cetacean research, 2) the 2022–2023 Japan progress report on small cetacean research, 3) the 2023–2024 report on satellite tagging experiments at the ICR, 4) the progress of the intersessional work on the NAMMCO-Japan research collaboration on Northeast Atlantic-Northwest Pacific Ecosystem and 5) outline of an international workshop on the use of genetic data for the identification of whale stocks, which was held in Taiji, Wakayama, Japan. Furthermore, they provided two published papers for

information to the meeting, which dealt with epigenetic studies on Antarctic minke whale. The report of the meeting can be found on the website of NAMMCO ([https://nammco.no/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/report\\_sc31.pdf](https://nammco.no/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/report_sc31.pdf)).

### **Marine Mammal Welfare Workshop and the 2025 Annual Meeting of NAMMCO Council**

The NAMMCO Workshop on Marine Mammal Welfare was held on 24 March at the Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway. The workshop, co-organized by NAMMCO and Japan, brought together about 60 participants—including hunters, veterinarians, scientists, and managers—from 11 communities and countries. Chaired by Ichiro Nomura from the Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ), the discussions focused on assessing welfare outcomes in marine mammal hunts. Presentations from regions of several countries, including Japan, were focused on the improvement of methods, data collection, and the importance of sharing experience to strengthen welfare standards while respecting cultural traditions. Yasunaga from the ICR presented the study titled 'The killing methods and data of time to death of cetaceans in the Japanese commercial whaling'.

Subsequently, the 32nd Annual Meeting of NAMMCO Council was held from 25 to 27 March in the same facility. Japan joined the meeting as an observer country, represented by officials from the FAJ, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and ICR (Yasunaga). The meeting reaffirmed NAMMCO's principle of sustainable use and responsible hunting of marine mammals and addressed key topics such as the outcomes of the North



Participants of the 31st Meeting of the NAMMCO Scientific Committee held at the Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway.



The Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway.

Atlantic Sightings Survey (NASS), the MINTAG satellite tagging project conducted with Japan, and the role of NAMMCO in contributing to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity to exchange views on animal welfare and management, confirmed Japan's cooperative role, and strengthened international networks for the sustainable use of marine mammal resources.

### **NAMMCO Abundance Estimate Working Group (AEWG)**

NAMMCO Abundance Estimates Working Group (AEWG) Meeting was held at the Greenland Representation in Copenhagen, Denmark, from 23 to 26 September. Scientists from four NAMMCO country members, five Invited Participants (IPs), four observers and two members from the NAMMCO Secretariat participated in the meeting. One scientist from the ICR (Hakamada) and one scientist from Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology (TUMSAT) (Kitakado) participated in the meeting as observer and IP, respectively. Scientists from Greenland, Faroe Islands, Iceland and Norway presented their abundance estimates of several cetacean species based on NASS 2024, which were reviewed at the workshop. Scientists representing the International Whaling Commission (IWC) Scientific Committee's Abundance Estimates, Stock Status and International Cruises (ASI) working group were also present at the meeting.

### **NAMMCO Genetic Working Group meeting**

The NAMMCO Genetic Working Group meeting was held online on 28 October, with an ICR scientist (Taguchi) attending as observer. The WG reviewed new information on the genetic structure of North Atlantic pilot whales and compared it with that in the existing literature. Pre-

liminary genomic results showed no population structure across the North Atlantic but confirmed clear differentiation from the Mediterranean pilot whale. The WG agreed that the analyses show no evidence of genetic structure within the North Atlantic and recommended several additional analyses to reveal adaptive variation. These conclusions will inform the stock assessment to be carried out by the NAMMCO's Pilot Whale Working Group (PWWG) later in 2025.

### **NAMMCO-Japan MINTAG project meetings**

NAMMCO and Japan have agreed on a collaborative project to develop a new satellite tag suited for use on fast swimming rorquals (fin, sei, Bryde's, blue and minke whales) and pilot whales, which are of most interest to NAMMCO countries and Japan. The project is called MINTAG project. The project started in 2022 and will run for five years. The project is divided into four phases: development phase, testing phase, deployment-data collection-analyses phase, and publication-final reporting-workshop phase. The project is led by a Steering Group composed of scientists from NAMMCO countries and Japan, the Secretariat of NAMMCO, and the FAJ. Yearly reports are available at <https://mintag-project.com/about-us/#reports>.

An in-person MINTAG Steering Group meeting was held from 19 to 20 January at the Fram Centre, Tromsø, Norway, with participation of Konishi (ICR). The main topic of this meeting were the evaluation of the tag performance for the 2024 deployments, and a web blog for the project in 2024 (<https://mintag-project.com/follow-the-whales/#mintag-2024>). During the year, Steering Group meetings were held online to discuss different technical aspects and progress of the MINTAG project; on 13 and 21 March (with participation of Konishi and Pastene from ICR) and on 30 April, 9 May, 8 September and 6 November (with participation of Katsumata and Pastene from ICR).

### **Korea–Japan Symposium on the Survey and Assessment of Cetaceans in the Northwest Pacific**

The Korea–Japan Symposium on the Survey and Assessment of Cetaceans in the Northwest Pacific was held from 26 to 28 June at the Cetacean Research Institute (CRI) of the National Institute of Fisheries Science in Ulsan, Korea. The event was hosted by the CRI and brought together researchers from Japan and Korea to exchange knowledge and explore cooperation on line-transect data analysis, current sighting surveys, stock assessment strategies, and age estimation methods for baleen whales. Two scientists from the ICR (Matsuoka and Yasunaga), and one



Greenland Representation in Copenhagen, Denmark, venue for the AEWG Meeting.



The Cetacean Research Institute in Ulsan, Korea (left), and participants of the Korea-Japan Symposium (right)



Images of the 2025 Annual Meeting of the North Pacific Marine Science Organization held in Yokohama.

from TUMSAT (Kitakado) participated in the symposium. Matsuoka presented the study titled 'Sighting survey and assessment of whales in Japan', and Yasunaga presented the study titled 'Age estimation approaches of baleen whales: Especially AAR method based on aspartic acid isomerization in lens core' and other titled 'Topic: Strategies for Whale Health Research—Using Chemical Pollutants as an Example—'.

### Annual Meeting of the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES)

The North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES) is an intergovernmental science organization established in 1992. The aim of PICES is to promote and coordinate marine scientific research in the North Pacific Ocean and its adjacent seas, and to provide a mechanism for information and data exchange among scientists of the member countries. The present members of PICES are Canada, Japan, People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America.

The 2025 Meeting of the PICES was held in Yokohama, Kanagawa, Japan. The business meeting of the Marine

Bird and Mammals (S-MBM) section was held on 8 November. Under the session 'Understanding the Linkages Between Forage Species and Top Predators and How They May Affect Resilience in North Pacific Ecosystems' held on 11 November, Tamura, Isoda and Fujise from the ICR presented the study titled 'The yearly changes of prey species and prey consumption by common minke, sei and Bryde's whale in the western North Pacific since 2000'. The report of the PICES Meeting can be found on the website of PICES (<https://meetings.pices.int/>).

### X Latin American Congress on Antarctic Science/XII Chilean Congress of Antarctic Research

The 'X Congreso Latinoamericano de Ciencia Antártica/XII Congreso Chileno de Investigaciones Antárticas' (X Latin American Congress on Antarctic Science/XII Chilean Congress of Antarctic Research) was held at Universidad Austral de Chile (UACH) in Valdivia, Chile, from 28 July to 1 August. The meeting was organized by the Centro de Investigación Dinámica de Ecosistemas Marinos de Altas Latitudes (IDEAL) of the UACH and was supported by the Instituto Antártico Chileno (INACH) based in Punta Are-



Presentation of the study on humpback whale microbiota at the X Latin American Congress on Antarctic Science/XII Chilean Congress of Antarctic Research held in Valdivia, Chile.

nas, and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), represented in Chile by the Consejo Nacional de Investigación Antártica (CNIA). Isoda and Pastene from the ICR, through co-author Moraga (Centro de Estudios del Cuaternario de Fuego-Patagonia y Antártica, CEQUA), presented the study titled 'Characterization of the microbiota of humpback whale skin and seawater in the Indian sector of the Antarctic', which resulted from a research collaboration between ICR and CEQUA, a research institution in Punta Arenas, Chile, dedicated to the biological and ecological research in Chilean Patagonia.

#### **Annual Meeting of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources Working Group on Ecosystem Monitoring and Management (CCAMLR-EMM)**

The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) is part of the Antarctic Treaty System. The Convention was opened for signature on 1 August 1980 and entered into force on 7 April 1982, thereby establishing the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. Its goal is to preserve marine life and environmental integrity in and near Antarctica. It was established in large part in response to concerns that an increase in krill catches in the Southern Ocean could have a serious impact on populations of other marine life, which are dependent upon krill for food. CCAMLR has a Scientific Committee and several Working Groups. One of these is the Working Group on Ecosystem Monitoring and Management (EMM), which



A session of the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resource's Working Group on Ecosystem Monitoring and Management held in Geilo, Norway.

meets annually.

The 2025 Meeting of the EMM Working Group was held from 7 to 18 July in Geilo, Norway. The main items on the meeting agenda were krill fishery management, spatial management and ecosystem monitoring. Under the spatial overlap analysis approach, several papers on monitoring of krill-dependent predators including whales in western Antarctic were presented. Isoda and colleagues from ICR submitted a document titled 'Results of the Japanese Abundance and Stock structure Survey in the Antarctic (JASS-A) during the 2024/2025 austral summer season', which was presented by Murase (TUMSAT).

#### **The 2025 Ecosystem Studies of the Subarctic and Arctic Seas (ESSAS) Open Science Meeting**

The Ecosystem Studies of Subarctic and Arctic Seas (ESSAS) is a regional program of Integrated Marine Biosphere Research (IMBER) that addresses the need to understand how climate change will affect the marine ecosystems of the Subarctic and Arctic Seas and their sustainability. Originally established in 2005 as a GLOBEC regional program focusing on Subarctic seas, ESSAS expanded its geographic scope in 2015 to include Arctic regions. The ESSAS program conducts comparative studies to quantify and predict the impact of climate variability on the productivity and sustainability of these marine ecosystems through four working groups focusing on regional climate prediction, biophysical coupling, ecosystem modeling, and gadoid-crustacean interactions.

The 2025 ESSAS Open Science Meeting entitled 'Past, Present and Future of Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystems' was held from 24 to 26 June at the National Institute of Polar Research in Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan.



Presentation of the POWER program at the 2025 ESSAS Open Science Meeting held in Tokyo, Japan.

Katsumata from the ICR presented the study 'Overview of the North Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research Programme (POWER) from 2010 to 2025'.

### The 2025 International Ocular Inflammation Society (IOIS) Congress

The International Ocular Inflammation Society (IOIS) is an academic organization dedicated to advancing research and clinical practice related to ocular inflammation. The congress of the Society provides a platform for presenting new findings and promoting international scientific exchange on this topic.

The 2025 IOIS Congress was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 25 to 28 June. The Congress featured a wide range of presentations in ocular immunology and retinal disease research. Yasunaga, Sakai and Fujise from ICR participated as co-authors in a collaborative study that examined the physiological effects of  $\omega$ -3 long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (LCPUFAs) derived from whale oil on choroidal neovascularization. This presentation received an IOIS Congress Award, recognizing the study's contribution to advancing understanding of nutritional modulation in ocular inflammation and pathophysiology of age-related macular degeneration.



International Ocular Inflammation Society 2025 'Best Free Paper—Category Poster Presentations' Award Certificate.

### International mini workshop on microbiota research at the Institute of Cetacean Research Taiji Office

The Executive Director (Paola Acuña) and Scientific Director (Jorge Acevedo) of CEQUA, a research institute located in Punta Arenas, Chile dedicated to the biological and ecological research in the Chilean Patagonia, visited the ICR Taiji Office from 3 to 6 October 2025. The visit was carried out in the context of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by ICR and CEQUA in November 2022, which had as aim to facilitate long term research cooperation between ICR and CEQUA in the field of cetacean conservation and management. Acuña and Acevedo were accompanied by a doctoral research student (Aída Murillo) of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Apart from offering lectures to the public of Taiji on the research activities of CEQUA, including specific research activities on whales, they and ICR scientists participated in a mini workshop on the feasibility of implementing microbiota research in ICR.

From the ICR, Fujise (Director General), Yasunaga (Head of Science), Isoda (Vice-Director of Research Department 1), Sugimoto (scientist from the Genetic Ecology Section), and Pastene (Scientific Advisor) participated in the mini workshop. The mini workshop, held on 5 October, had two main sections. The first section was dedicated to lectures including an introduction to microbiota research using DNA sequences of the 16S rRNA gene; and microbiota research in humpback whales from Stock D and G in the Southern Hemisphere. The second section was dedicated to panel discussions on the feasibility of implementing microbiota research on whales and environment at the ICR. The panel discussion was organized to discuss objectives, platforms and protocols for sampling, laboratory and analytical work and future microbiota research collaboration between ICR and CEQUA. Results of the mini workshop are being examined and evaluated by the ICR.



International mini workshop on microbiota research at the ICR Taiji Office, Wakayama, Japan.

### **Mid-term international review workshop of the Japanese Abundance and Stock structure Surveys (JASS-A)**

The Japanese Abundance and Stock structure Surveys (JASS-A) is a research program designed and implemented by the ICR and authorized by the Government of Japan (GOJ) in the Antarctic. The main research objectives of JASS-A are: i) the study of the abundance and abundance trends of large whale species; and ii) the study of the distribution, movement and stock structure of large whale species. JASS-A also has several secondary research objectives related to oceanography, marine debris and whale biology. JASS-A is based on systematic sighting surveys using Distance sampling (line transect), which are conducted alternatively in IWC Areas III, IV, V and VI by one or two specialized vessels. The tentative period of JASS-A is eight austral summer seasons (2019/20–2026/27).

The mid-term international review (MTR) workshop of JASS-A was carried out successfully in Tokyo between 20 and 22 October 2025 under two Terms of Reference: i) to evaluate the works conducted so far (2019/20–2024/25) in the context of the main and secondary objectives of JASS-A; and ii) to discuss recommendations for further field and analytical works with the aim of achieving the main and secondary objectives of JASS-A by the time of the final review of the program (after the final survey in 2026/27). A total of 28 scientific documents derived from the JASS-A program was discussed between Japanese scientists and invited participants from Norway, United Kingdom, Germany and South Africa. A total of 24 scientists, two government officials (FAJ) and two interpreters participated in the workshop. The scientific outputs from the JASS-A program were well evaluated and useful suggestions and recommendations were provided by the

MTR workshop, which will improve the ICR's Antarctic research in the future.

### **Sixth Joint Meeting of the Acoustical Society of Japan and the Acoustical Society of America**

The Acoustical Society of Japan (ASJ) was founded in 1936 by 15 physicists and has evolved into an interdisciplinary society along with the development of acoustics. Acoustics was originally a branch of physics. However, as a result of incorporating aspects of physiology, psychology, and computer science, it became an extensive field with various applications. The ASJ has eight technical committees.

A Joint Meeting of the Acoustical Society of Japan (ASJ) and the Acoustical Society of America (ASA) was held from 1 to 5 December at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. This international collaboration brings together acousticians from across the Pacific to exchange research findings and advance the field of acoustics. The meeting featured technical sessions across all branches of acoustics, including underwater acoustics, animal bioacoustics, acoustical oceanography, signal processing, and noise control. Special sessions and standing sessions were organized to address emerging topics and facilitate focused discussions on specific research areas. Yamada, Katsumata, Isoda and Matsuoka from the ICR presented the study titled 'Passive acoustic monitoring for baleen whale detections during winter off northeastern Japan' in the Baleen Whale Acoustics session of the meeting.

### **Technical Adviser Group (TAG) Meeting and 2026 cruise planning meeting for the IWC-POWER program**

IWC-POWER (Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research) is a large international research program aimed to study the abundance and abundance trend of large whales in the North Pacific through annual dedicated sighting surveys. The program is designated and implemented by the Scientific Committee of the IWC through a Steering Group, which in turn includes a Technical Adviser Group (TAG). The TAG usually meets once a year. The IWC-POWER program has carried out surveys with the participation of scientists from Japan, USA, Russian Federation, Republic of Korea and Mexico.

The 2025 TAG meeting and the 2026-2027 cruise planning meeting were held from 7 to 9 December at the International Cetacean Center, Taiji, Wakayama, Japan. The TAG Meeting was co-chaired by Kitakado of the TUMSAT and Matsuoka of ICR. Matsuoka also chaired the planning meeting. In addition, Miyashita, Katsumata and Murata from the ICR participated in the meetings.



Participants of the JASS-A mid-term international review workshop held in Tokyo, Japan.

## **II International Meeting for the Study of Aquatic Mammals by the Mexican Society on Aquatic Mammals and Latin American Society of Aquatic Mammal Specialists**

Isoda and Pastene from the ICR were co-authors of the study titled 'Colaboración internacional para el estudio de cetáceos en sus áreas de alimentación: el ejemplo de CEQUA (Chile) y ICR (Japón)' (International collaboration

for cetacean studies in feeding areas: the case of CEQUA (Chile) and ICR (Japan)), presented to the II Reunión Internacional para el Estudio de los Mamíferos Acuáticos SOMEMMA-SOLAMAC (II International Meeting for the Study of Aquatic Mammals - Mexican Society on Aquatic Mammals and Latin American Society of Aquatic Mammal Specialists), held at Mazatlán, Mexico, from 8 to 12 December.