



KILLER WHALE (NORTHWEST ATLANTIC/EASTERN ARCTIC POPULATION)

Consultations on listing under the *Species at Risk Act*

Information summary and questionnaire for the consultations on adding Killer Whale, Northwest Atlantic/Eastern Arctic population, to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as Special Concern – **Please provide your input by March 15, 2015**

Consultations

Let your opinion be heard

Canada's *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* provides legal protection for wildlife species at risk to conserve biological diversity. It also acknowledges that all Canadians have a role to play in the conservation of wildlife species.

Before deciding whether Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) (Figure 1), Northwest Atlantic/Eastern Arctic population, will be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, we would like to hear your opinion, comments, and suggestions regarding the possible ecological, cultural, and economic impacts of listing or not listing this species under *SARA*.

Adding a population to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk...

The process of listing a species under Canada's *SARA* consists of several steps: it begins with a status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and ends with a Government of Canada decision on whether or not to add a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. Public consultations are also conducted to gather views of Canadians and are an important step in this process.

Facts about Killer Whale

The Killer Whale is a long-lived predator often referred to as orca and, in the past, as grampus, thrasher, and blackfish. It is also known as "aarluk" in Inuktitut. Females can live to be 80 years and

males 40–50 years. Females give birth to their first calf when they are between 12 and 17 years of age and produce a single calf every 5 years on average. Individuals can be distinguished by scars, variations in pigmentation, and dorsal fin shape. Body length can be up to 9 m for males and 7.7 m for females.

The distribution of Killer Whales (Figure 2) in the northwestern Atlantic and eastern Arctic is not well documented. Historically, they were common in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and St. Lawrence Estuary; however, they are now most often recorded in the coastal waters of Newfoundland, particularly in the Strait of Belle Isle. Sightings in the eastern Arctic have increased over the past few decades, particularly within the Hudson Bay region, whereas Killer Whales are uncommon in the western Arctic. Killer Whale movement does not appear to be limited by features of their environment other than ice in high latitudes. Receding sea ice appears to be making new habitat (and prey resources) available to Killer Whales in the Arctic.



Figure 1. Killer Whale.



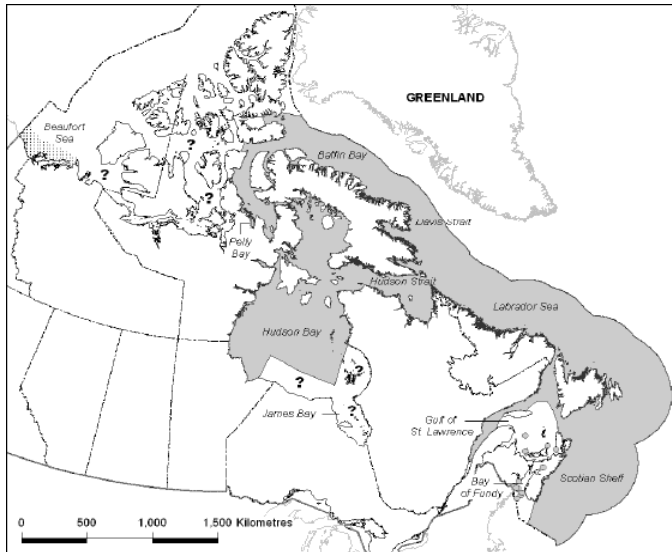


Figure 2. The range of Killer Whales in Canadian waters in the northwestern Atlantic and eastern Canadian Arctic. COSEWIC 2008.

Who assigned the Special Concern status to Killer Whale?

COSEWIC is an independent committee of experts that assesses and designates which wildlife species are in some danger of disappearing from Canada and assigns these species a status. It conducts its assessments based on the best available information including scientific data, local ecological knowledge, and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. COSEWIC assessed the status of the Northwest Atlantic/Eastern Arctic population of Killer Whale in Canada as Special Concern in November 2008.

Why is Killer Whale assessed at risk?

COSEWIC concluded that threats to this population include hunting in Greenland, acoustic and physical disturbance (which according to COSEWIC will become greater as shipping traffic increases in the Arctic), and contaminants. This population's small size (fewer than 1,000 mature individuals and possibly less than 250) and the species' low

population growth rate justify its designation as Special Concern.

If a species is listed under the *Species at Risk Act*...

If the Northwest Atlantic/Eastern Arctic population of Killer Whale is listed, given the Special Concern status, the prohibitions (for example, prohibitions against killing, harming, and capturing) of SARA would not apply. However, listing would result in the development of a SARA management plan that will include conservation measures for the population to reduce threats resulting from human activity.

We would like to receive your comments on the potential impacts of adding or not adding the Northwest Atlantic/Eastern Arctic population of Killer Whale to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA as Special Concern.

Your comments are important.

Please fill out the questionnaire: we want to hear from you.

A copy of the 2008 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on Killer Whale and other information can be found on the SARA registry at www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

References

COSEWIC. 2008. COSEWIC assessment and update status report on the Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*, Southern Resident population, Northern Resident population, West Coast Transient population, Offshore population and Northwest Atlantic/Eastern Arctic population, in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. viii + 65 pp. (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

