

Response Statement - Killer Whale, Northwest Atlantic / Eastern Arctic populations

November 25, 2009

Common Name: Killer Whale, Northwest Atlantic / Eastern Arctic populations

Scientific Name: *Orcinus orca*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Special Concern

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake consultations with the governments of Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Nunavut, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board and the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Killer Whale, Northwest Atlantic / Eastern Arctic populations, should be added to the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act* as Special Concern. The Minister of the Environment will forward the COSEWIC assessment of the Killer Whale, Northwest Atlantic / Eastern Arctic populations, to the Governor in Council upon completion of consultations.

Once a species has been assessed by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. For more information on this process, please view [The Species Listing Process Under SARA](#).

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: Threats to this population include hunting in Greenland, acoustical and physical disturbance, which will become greater as shipping traffic increases in the Arctic, and contaminants. This population's small size (fewer than 1000 mature individuals and likely less than 250) and the species' life history and social attributes justify designation as Special Concern.

Occurrence: Arctic Ocean, Atlantic Ocean

Competent Minister(s):

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency

Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:

Manitoba

Ontario

Quebec

Newfoundland and Labrador

New Brunswick

Nova Scotia

Prince Edward Island

Nunavut

Applicable federal legislation:

Conservation activities underway: In Canada, killer whales are protected under the *Marine Mammal Regulations* (MMRs) of the *Fisheries Act*, which prohibit hunting without a license, except by Aboriginal groups. Voluntary whale watching guidelines also exist and the department of Fisheries and Oceans is in the process of developing specific regulations governing marine mammal watching. To assess population numbers for the eastern Canadian Arctic and Atlantic Canada, killer whale photographs are being collected and analyzed to determine the number of uniquely identifiable individuals (by colour pattern, marks, and fin shape). To understand movements, sightings of killer whales are being assembled and analyzed to determine seasonal use of Arctic areas, group size, and predation activity. Also, Inuit Traditional Ecological Knowledge of killer whales is being surveyed from Nunavut communities to document local biological knowledge. Killer whales are being tagged with satellite transmitters in the eastern Arctic to determine winter occupancy and movement patterns. Studies are also underway to assess food habits, determine trophic food (fish or marine mammal) and seasonal changes in diet. Autonomous acoustic recorders have been deployed at various locations on the Grand Banks to detect and classify killer whale sounds to assess residency patterns and group affiliations.