SUBMISSION TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD (NWMB)

Regular Meeting No. RM 002-2022

FOR

Information: ☐ Decision: ☒

Issue: *Proposed 10-Year Program to Increase the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) for Baffin Island Caribou (BIC), 2022-2032*

Background:

Assertion of Primacy of Inuit Systems of Wildlife Management in Decisions in Nunavut

In December 2020, the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board (QWB) adopted the position to assert that the Nunavut Agreement, a constitutionally protected treaty between the Inuit of Nunavut and the Crown of Canada, provides primacy to Inuit Systems of Wildlife Management with respect to decision-making processes and outcomes regarding wildlife and wildlife harvesting by Inuit. This primacy extends to Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) because IQ is the basis for Inuit Systems of Wildlife Management. In this context, "primacy" refers to what comes first and remains most important. Inuit Systems of Wildlife Management are specifically recognized in sub-section 5.1.2(e) of the Nunavut Agreement. Other sections of Article 5 of the Nunavut Agreement point out the special rights and effective roles that Inuit have in wildlife management and harvesting in Nunavut. Science and scientific wildlife management are not mentioned in Article 5 of the Nunavut Agreement. The QWB asserts that any wildlife management plan, recommendation, decision or other measure established or implemented regarding caribou or other wildlife in Qikiqtaaluk Region needs give primacy to Inuit rights, Inuit Systems of Wildlife Management, and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. This view is supported by both the Nunavut Agreement and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Inuit System of Long-term Management of Caribou on Baffin Island

Since time immemorial, Inuit on Qikiqtaaluk (i.e., Baffin Island and nearby islands) have known about and managed the long-term population caribou cycles that occur over the lifetime of an elder, or about 70-90 years. Children are taught by elders that if there are many caribou in their young years, there will be very few caribou when they have children of their own to feed, but if they live to become elders, there will be many caribou again. Inuit know and recognize many more specific signs of shorter-term changes that predict how the caribou population will change in local areas and across the island in the near future throughout the 70-90-year cycles.

During each phase of the long-term cycle, Inuit have harvest management strategies that are stated very simply, but include a huge amount of knowledge and deep understanding of the factors and processes that cause, regulate and affect each phase. For example:

"Snow is no problem unless there have been too many caribou for too long."

This statement reflects Inuit understanding that the amount of lichen food for caribou in winter is a major factor in the growth and decline phases of caribou populations on Qikiqtaaluk, and that over time, caribou can deplete their lichen food resources when there has been "too many caribou for too long". Lichens have no roots and grow very slowly. If caribou find ample lichen after digging through snow, they can maintain their strength and dig through deep, hard snow. If they do not find ample lichen, they become weaker, cannot get enough food, move to other areas, feed in riskier areas like cliff faces, become more susceptible to wolf predation, and produce fewer calves that may not survive, resulting in gradual but dramatic declines in abundance and distribution over about 15 years in one phase of the cycle. When there have been "too many caribou for too long" and while lichen food resources have not yet recovered, males can be important for the entire population because, with their heavier and stronger bodies, they may break through hard surface snow and sometimes ice when digging craters for feeding. Thereby, males can enable females and calves to expand the craters started, so they too can access more food during winter.

The decline phases of the long-term cycles are all very normal and predictable for Qikiqtaaluk caribou. In the late 1990s and early 2000s after decades of too-many caribou, Inuit across Qikiqtaaluk started to see signs of impending decline, and predicted the next great decline phase of the long-term cycle.

The QWB and southern Qikiqtaaluk HTOs called for an IQ-based management plan for the decline phase expected by Inuit during 2005 – 2020. Based on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and elders' predictions, the plan was developed but not implemented. The QWB also called for development of a similar IQ-based plan for northern Qikiqtaaluk but this was not undertaken.

Based on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Inuit observations of caribou in many areas, the long-term cycle has now entered a new critical phase that requires a major change from the current harvest management strategy that is being used by the GN because the depleted lichen food for caribou has not had time to replenish itself. Caribou have the potential to increase in abundance faster than depleted lichen can grow.

The GN has managed the caribou for immediate maximum population increases ever since 2015. By limiting harvesting to mainly males and a few females, the caribou may increase in some years, but they will potentially eat as much lichen food as grows each year but the lichen is already depleted. The GN's strategy could keep the caribou's food in an over-eaten, depleted condition for many years, perhaps perpetually depleted so that the abundant Qikiqtaaluk caribou population of the 1970s – 2000s may not return.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Inuit intentionally managed caribou using a very different strategy, one that applies again today! Even though there were few caribou in the 1950s, Inuit elders knew that:

"We had to keep harvesting the caribou. The land needed to rest."

In the 1950s and 1960s, important Inuit elders knew that there had been *"too many caribou for too long"* in previous decades, and caribou abundance declined, as Inuit had predicted in the 1930s and 1940s because they did not have enough lichen to eat. They knew that "*the land had to rest"* with a low abundance of caribou maintained by Inuit for one or two decades in the 1950s and 1960s. That harvest strategy allowed the caribou's slow-growing winter food,

lichen, to recover in large amounts over large areas again, so it could support great abundances of caribou seen in later decades.

The great abundance of caribou on Qikiqtaaluk from about 1970 to the early 2000s was not an unexplainable accident. It occurred because of the Inuit System of Caribou Management, intentional harvesting by Inuit near local communities, camps and elsewhere during previous decades.

This Inuit System of caribou management, based on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, must be enabled and implemented again today over the next 10-20 years, so that the critical food of caribou, lichen, may recover to sufficient quantities to support the next great abundance of Qikiqtaaluk caribou. Consistent with all of the principles of conservation in the Nunavut Agreement, this Inuit System will:

- Maintain the natural balance of lichen-caribou-Inuit ecological system that has existed since time immemorial
- Protect caribou winter habitats
- Maintain a vital, healthy caribou population capable of sustaining Inuit harvesting into future decades
- Restore and revitalize a depleted population of caribou and their habitat over the long term.

Consultation:

After consultations with the HTOs, in 2018, 2019 and 2020 the QWB proposed modest increases in the 2015 Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) for Baffin Island caribou. The NWMB did not approve any of these requests, although a minor adjustment in the harvest of females was allowed in 2020.

The 2021 Annual General Meeting of the QWB discussed the above IQ and the Inuit System of Baffin Island caribou management, with advice and input from staff of NTI. Most HTO delegates recommended that, as soon as possible, the allocations for their communities should double and possibly more. That would require an increase in the TAH from 250 to 500 in one year.

The QWB Executive subsequently approved a more modest, longer-term proposal that remains consistent with the Inuit System of caribou management based on:

"The land needs to rest."

Recommendation:

The QWB Executive recommends to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) that the NWMB approves and implements the following Inuit System of caribou harvest management on Baffin Island starting on July 1, 2022:

1. a) An initial increase of the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) for Baffin Island caribou of 100 on July 1, 2022 for a total of 350 caribou;

b) A second increase of the TAH for Baffin Island caribou of 75 on July 1, 2023 for a total of 425 caribou;

c) Then subsequent annual increases of the TAH for Baffin Island caribou of 50 in each of the next 8 years to reach a total of 825 on July 1, 2031.

2. Adjust the Non-Quota Limitation until the maximum harvest of females will be about 50% females of the annual TAH by July 1, 2031, in the following way:

   a) On July 1, 2022, the increase of the TAH will be composed of a maximum of 50 females for a total of up to 75 females;

   b) On July 1, 2023, the increase of the TAH will be composed of a maximum of 40 females for a total of up to 115 females; and

   c) Then annually until July 1, 2031, the increase in the TAH will be composed of a maximum of 37 females until a total of 411 females may be harvested during the harvest year 2031-2032.

3. Until at least June 30, 2032, the Basic Needs Level for Inuit will equal the entire annual TAH.

4. The QWB will reassess the schedule of increases in the TAH after five years (in 2027) to determine if subsequent annual TAH and NQL increases should change, based on all available information. The GN will be consulted in this reassessment process. If a change in the subsequent TAHs and NQLs is warranted, the QWB will make a proposal to the NWMB for any recommended changes.

5. The QWB will base annual HTO allocations on the following factors:

   a) previous three-year average harvest for each community,
   b) less any over-allocation harvesting,
   c) plus a portion of the next year's annual TAH increase and any under-harvest of the TAH,
   d) and any other adjustments that the QWB Executive determines to be appropriate.

6. To assess the success and sustainability of this Inuit System, the QWB and HTOs will undertake the following:

   a) Each year by about June 30, each HTO Board will inform the QWB Director of Wildlife as to whether the abundance and distribution of caribou in their area have been increasing, stable or decreasing during the previous year.

   b) The combined information from all 10 HTOs will be assessed annually by the QWB Executive to help determine if the method for allocating the TAH should be continued or modified.

   c) The QWB and HTOs will undertake additional annual non-invasive science- and IQ-based community monitoring of caribou winter distributions and abundances.

   d) The QWB and HTOs will initiate monitoring of caribou-lichen food resources, similar to methods used by reindeer herders in Alaska, as soon as possible.

e) The QWB and HTOs may use additional monitoring methods (e.g., snow distributions and conditions) as needed and available.

7. During 2031-2032, the QWB will assess whether or not the TAH may be eliminated on July 1, 2032, or if the TAH and NQL changes should be continued or modified in future, based on all available information. The GN will be consulted during this assessment process. The QWB will make a proposal to the NWMB for any recommended changes.

Prepared by: Michael Ferguson and Kolola Pitsiulak, Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board

Date: May 6, 2022