

**SUBMISSION TO THE  
NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD  
JUNE 2022**

**FOR**

**Information:**

**Decision: X**

**Issue:** Decision required regarding possible plans for consultation in Nunavut and possible decision-making regarding the potential addition of the Sei Whale to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk on the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

**Background:**

As per 3.5 of the Harmonized Listing Process, the Department of Fisheries & Oceans (DFO) is informing the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessment results and a DFO intent to consult on the Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) (Atlantic population) (Figure 1).

**Sei Whale**

The Sei Whale is a large whale that occurs off Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Labrador. The population was greatly reduced by whaling that ended in 1972. Systematic surveys of Canadian Atlantic waters in 2007 and 2016 recorded few animals. The current population is likely fewer than 1,000 mature individuals, perhaps only a few hundred or less, and below its size at the end of whaling.

The species is grey in colour, with a variable white region on its underside. These areas may appear mottled, with grey or white circular scars caused by various predators or parasites. Both the lower left and right jaws are dark in colour. The dorsal fin is tall and slender. The average size for adults is 15 m and 19 tonnes. They may live to 60 years of age, and may be the fastest of the marine mammals, capable of short bursts in excess of 55 km/hour. They feed on zooplankton like other right whales. The Sei Whale is often confused with the more common Fin Whale.

The Sei Whale was considered by COSEWIC in May 2003 and placed in the Data Deficient category. COSEWIC re-examined the Sei Whale (Atlantic population) and designated it Endangered in May 2019.



**Figure 1:** Image of the Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) (© NOAA 2019).

### **Significance**

The third largest whale species after the Blue and Fin Whale, Sei whales are one of the most poorly understood of all baleen whales. Although they were heavily hunted in the modern whaling era, their current distribution, migration patterns and behaviour are not well studied. Because the Sei Whale is rarely found near shore, it is not the primary target of whale watching operations. Sei Whales do not seem to have been an important resource for coastal Indigenous groups in Canada, although the species likely has a significant ecological role.

### **Distribution**

Sei whales are found in all the oceans of the world and make seasonal migrations from low-latitude wintering areas to high-latitude summer feeding grounds. While the locations of the wintering grounds are relatively unknown, Sei Whales are found in the summers in the Labrador Sea, off Newfoundland, and on the Scotian Shelf and Slope and at least some individuals are present in these waters in the fall, winter and spring. There is one confirmed offshore sighting in southern Baffin Bay (Figure 2), but no records of the species being nearshore.

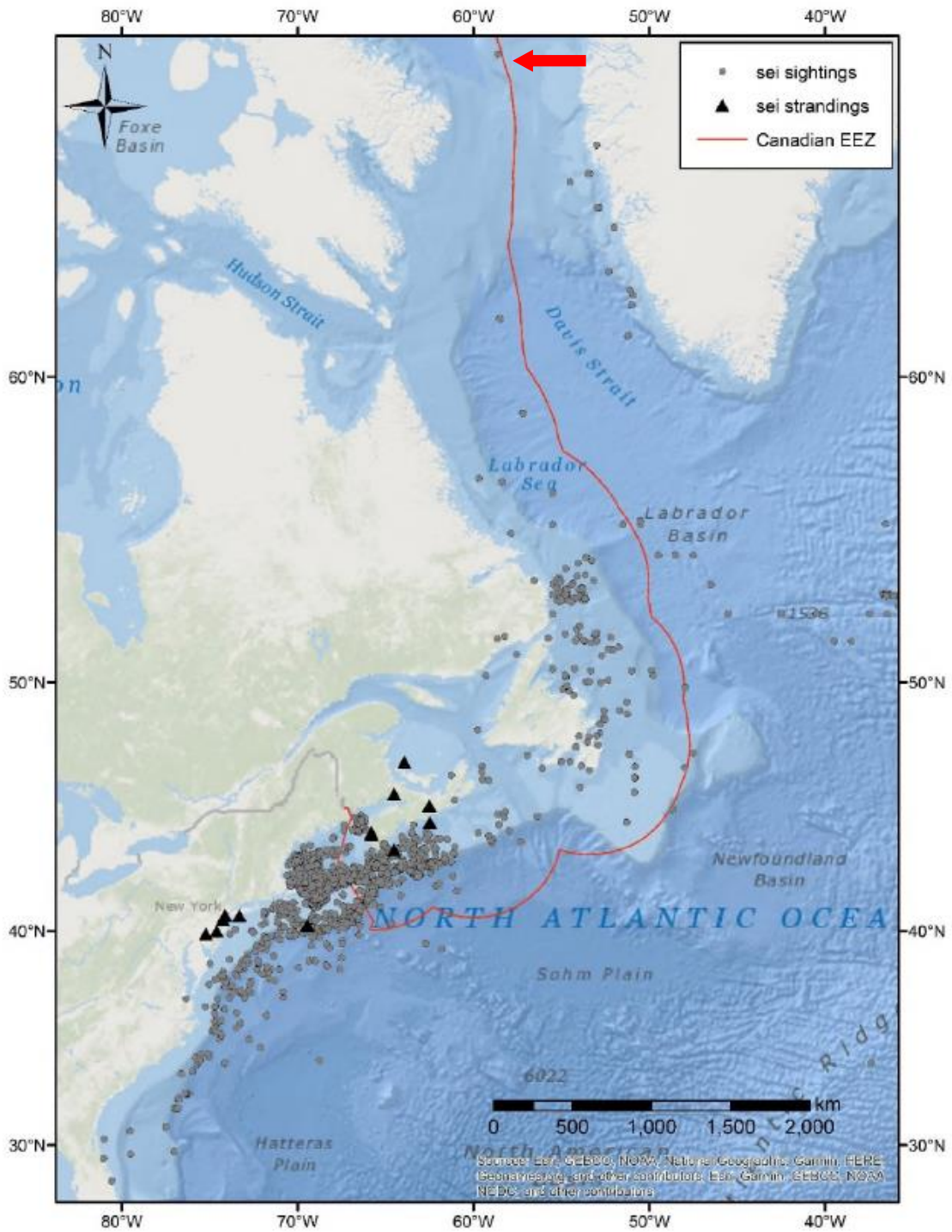
### **Threats and Limiting Factors**

Current threats to Sei Whales include the noise from seismic surveys, shipping and military exercises, vessel strikes, and entanglement in fishing gear. Insufficient access to prey may limit the productivity of Sei Whale populations.

### **Requirements for Consultation and Approval**

Article 5.2.34 (f) of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement states that the NWMB shall, at its discretion, approve the designation of rare, threatened or endangered species. As well, Section 27 (2) (c) of the SARA requires that before making a recommendation as to whether or not to add a species at risk to Schedule 1, the Minister must consult the Board for species found in an area in respect of which the Board is authorized by a land claims agreement to perform its functions.

Given that Sei Whale are extremely scarce in the Davis Strait area, it would seem probable that Sei Whale are similarly rare visitors to Nunavut waters and are far offshore from Baffin Island and the Nunavut Settlement Area. However, because there is a possibility they may occasionally venture into the area co-managed by NWMB, DFO is seeking the Boards expectation for consultations, if any, for this species.



**Figure 2.** Range of the Sei Whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) (Atlantic population) in northern waters (from COSEWIC 2019). Single confirmed sighting in south Baffin Bay is indicated by red arrow.

**Consultation and Approval:**

If the NWMB deems it to be appropriate, DFO could consult with communities identified by the Board for any information on sightings and their opinion on listing the Sei Whale. These consultations would ensure that any listing decision is made in full consideration of the views of Inuit and would be used by the Minister to decide whether to recommend legal listing of the Sei Whale.

If NWMB deems consultations to be appropriate, once completed, DFO would provide the Board with a summary of the community consultations for the Sei Whale. At a later date we would inform the Board what the Minister plans to recommend to the Governor-in-Council with regards to listing. At that time DFO would ask the Board whether or not it wishes to express an opinion on listing.

**Prepared by:**

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**Date:**

March 29, 2022