

SUBMISSION TO THE
NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD
NOVEMBER 2023

FOR

Information: X

Recommendation:

Decision:

Issue: Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) – Fisheries Management (FM) Operational Updates

Updates:

Marine Mammals:

1. Narwhal
 - The total reported landings for Narwhal management units in the 2022/23 harvest season were: Jones Sound 18, Smith Sound 0, Northern Hudson Bay 121, Somerset Island 111, East Baffin Island 147, Admiralty Inlet 194, and Eclipse Sound 103.
 - Following confirmation of season dates and allocations for 2023/24, narwhal tags (including carry-over tags) and information packages were distributed to all harvesting communities in the spring/summer of 2023.
 - While judicial review proceedings are ongoing regarding DFO's application of 2021/22 narwhal season dates and allocations to the 2022/23 harvest year, the Nunavut Narwhal Working Group continues to work on its review and update of the *Integrated Fisheries Management Plan (IFMP) for Narwhal in the Nunavut Settlement Area*. Narwhal Working Group meetings were most recently held in 2023 on March 15, May 4, and July 4, with additional meetings planned this fiscal year.
 - In 2020, DFO Science published two Science Advisory Reports (SAR) regarding Baffin Bay narwhal. [SAR 2020/048](#) contains information related to the delineation of the Eclipse Sound and Admiralty Inlet narwhal stocks. [SAR 2020/051](#) describes an estimated abundance and Total Allowable Landed Catch for the Eclipse Sound narwhal stock. Consultation regarding this science advice has been delayed owing in part to the COVID-19 pandemic. With travel restrictions now lifted, DFO FM is planning in-person visits to Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet this fiscal year to consult on this science advice.
 - In planning for the 2024/25 harvest season, DFO requests that Hunters and Trappers Organizations/Associations (HTOs/HTAs) return both the used and unused tags and harvest sheets from 2023/24 by the close of the season (March 31, 2024). Prior to distributing the 2024 harvest tags, 2023 harvest data will be reconciled, carry-over allocations will be calculated, and community allocations will be sought from Regional Wildlife Organizations (RWOs).

2. Walrus

- The total reported landings for walrus within the Nunavut Settlement Area for the 2022/23 season was 139 harvested for subsistence and 29 harvested by sport hunters. However, numerous communities did not provide a report of subsistence harvest.
- Due to lack of community engagement, DFO decided that the Community Based Catch Monitoring program for walrus would be paused in 2023/24. The Nunavut Walrus Working Group (NWWG) will discuss possible improvements to the program prior to reimplementation.
- Of the 152 walrus sport hunts approved by the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) and DFO for 2023, 58 walrus sport hunt licences were issued and DFO has received reports from 21 of these hunts. DFO staff will continue to follow up with sport hunt outfitters to ensure receipt of reporting information and biological samples in the coming months.
- Following the NWMB's decision to discontinue their Interim Walrus Sport Hunt Policy after the 2023 season, the NWWG has been meeting and co-developing an updated process to ensure the sustainable management and efficient licensing of walrus sport hunts in Nunavut with Inuit outfitters. Under this updated process, walrus will continue to be sustainably harvested by Inuit and sport hunters while providing economic benefits to Nunavut communities.
- The updated draft walrus sport hunt licensing process currently involves eight steps as follows:
 1. Call for applications;
 2. Outfitters submit applications to HTO and RWO/DFO;
 3. HTOs review applications;
 4. RWOs review applications;
 5. Request for Special RWO Reserve;
 6. DFO reviews applications;
 7. DFO issues Marine Mammal Fishing Licences; and
 8. Collect and submit biological samples.
- DFO FM staff distributed the current draft walrus sport hunt licensing process in both English and Inuktitut to the NWWG on October 5 and have requested support letters from each NWWG organization regarding the new process. DFO staff will soon be submitting a memo to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada for approval of the new process.
- While the new process is being finalized, DFO has encouraged each RWO to distribute a call for 2024 Walrus Sport Hunt Applications to regional HTOs and outfitters. This will ensure adequate time for application review and approvals prior to next year's sport hunts.

3. Beluga

- The total reported landings for beluga within the Nunavut Settlement Area for the 2022/23 season was 481. However, numerous communities did not provide a report of harvests in 2022/23.
- The Cumberland Sound Beluga Working Group (CSB-WG) continues to meet regularly throughout the year. The CSB-WG last met in Pangnirtung on October 12, 2023. This was the first CSB-WG meeting to be held in person in Pangnirtung since the COVID-19 pandemic. A public meeting was also held the same day to discuss the findings of [DFO's SAR published online in December 2022](#) regarding genetic population structure of beluga whales in Cumberland Sound and provide updates on CSB-WG and DFO Science activities. The next CSB-WG meeting is tentatively planned for January 2024.

4. Bowhead

A. Harvest

- The Total Allowable Harvest of Eastern Arctic-West Greenland bowhead whales in Nunavut is 5 per year (Qikiqtaaluk 2, Kivalliq 2, Kitikmeot 1). Following the approval of hunt plans by RWOs and penthrite grenade training by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., DFO issued licences for 2023 bowhead hunts in Igloolik, Coral Harbour, Naujaat, and Taloyoak.
- The hunts in Igloolik, Naujaat, and Taloyoak were successful in landing a whale, while the hunt in Arctic Bay was cancelled. At the time this briefing note was written, Coral Harbour had not yet harvested a whale.
- Sample kits were provided by DFO Science to all communities who were issued a licence this year. DFO will continue to follow up with communities in the coming months to ensure receipt of harvest information and biological samples.

B. Management Plan

- DFO Fisheries Management is now able to resume work activities related to updating the bowhead management plan and will contact Bowhead Working Group members in the fall of 2023 to identify suitable meeting dates.

Arctic Char

1. Pangnirtung:

- In 2022/23, a total of approximately 19,154 kg of Arctic char was reported harvested in Cumberland Sound.
- For 2023/24, the Arctic char summer fishery in Cumberland Sound opened on July 31. DFO Fisheries Management staff flew to Pangnirtung to assist with the opening of the fishery and meet with the HTO, fish plant, and fishers. Approximately 40 fishers participated in the summer fishery and fished 13 waterbodies, with a total of approximately 16,000 kg round weight of char reported landed at the Pangnirtung fish plant.
- Additional char fishing in Cumberland Sound is expected to occur during the upcoming winter season.

2. Kivalliq:

- In 2023/24, the Arctic char commercial summer fishery in the Kivalliq region was approximately 8,100 kg.
- In March 2023, DFO hosted another Kivalliq char workshop in Rankin Inlet including participants from Kivalliq HTOs, Government of Nunavut (GN) Wildlife Officers, and the Kivalliq Wildlife Board. Findings from the workshop will be used to continue the development of emerging and commercial Arctic char fisheries and to guide future char research in the region.
- In 2023, a pilot community-based program was initiated in Rankin Inlet to document bycatch in Arctic char subsistence harvest. Bycatch consisted mostly of discarded Arctic char and cod, but also included lumpfish and sculpin. Arctic char are often discarded for various reasons such as the size or condition of the char. When possible, bycatch species were often released alive.
- The Kivalliq Arctic char diet study was continued by DFO in 2023. Twenty (20) sea-run Arctic char were captured from the Diana River in mid-August. Although samples from 2023 have not yet been examined, results from previous years indicate that Diana River Arctic char eat mainly smaller marine fish species such as capelin and sand lance, and to a lesser degree shrimp-like organisms. Capelin and sand lance do not contain any carotenoids (the pigments responsible for the red colouration of char muscle) while shrimp-like organisms contain very high levels of this pigment. This is likely why the colour of Diana River char muscle is lighter than other locations in the Kivalliq region, such as char from Naujaat, whose main food source is shrimp-like organisms.

3. Cambridge Bay:

- The Cambridge Bay IFMP Working Group met virtually in June 2023 for its annual meeting to review the IFMP and discuss the fishery's operation. The Working Group includes the Ekaluktutiak HTO, Kitikmeot Foods Ltd. (KFL), GN, commercial fishers, community elders, and DFO.
- Commercial harvest occurred at four sites in 2023: Ekalluk, Halokvik (30-Mile), Jayko, and Surrey. Lauchlan was not harvested this year. A total of 36,971 kg (round weight) or 80% of the targeted quota was harvested.
- Overall, the commercial harvests were successful given challenges KFL faced before the start of fishing after its long-time manager resigned in June 2023. KFL staff managed the plant during the commercial harvest in the absence of a plant manager to ensure the commercial harvest could still occur.
- DFO staff worked closely with KFL to provide information and recorded landings to ensure there was no over-harvest.
- In 2023 the commercial plant sampling program was again successful in providing fisher-dependent biological data and samples from 200 Arctic char from the four locations that were commercially fished.
- DFO will be planning an IFMP Working Group Meeting and post-season fishing meeting in 2024.

- 2023 research on Arctic char, lake trout, ogacs, and/or kanoyaks included data collection for analysis of mixed-stock fisheries, marine microplastics and contaminants, effects of temperature on fish performance, and movement/habitat use in the marine environment and in the Grenier Lake watershed.

Greenland Halibut (Turbot)

- Following a productive 2023 winter fishing season in which 550 t of turbot was harvested in the Cumberland Sound Turbot Management Area (CSTMA), DFO issued a licence in mid-July for open-water turbot fishing in Cumberland Sound for the remaining 25 t. To date, no landings have been reported for the summer fishery.
- In preparation for the upcoming winter turbot fishery in the CSTMA, DFO staff are planning in-person pre-season meetings in Pangnirtung in January 2024.

Fish Stocks Provisions

- DFO is seeking feedback on a proposal for a regulatory amendment to the *Fishery (General) Regulations* (FGR) to list the second batch of major fish stocks that would be subject to the Fish Stocks provisions (sections 6.1-6.3) of the *Fisheries Act*, including Arctic Char stocks in Cambridge Bay (Jayko and Halokvik Rivers) and Cumberland Sound [Ijaruvung Lake, Iqalugaarjuit (Iqalujjuaq Fiord), and Irvine Inlet], as well as Northern (*Pandalus borealis*) and Striped (*P. Montagu*) shrimp in the Eastern Assessment Zone.
- The Fish Stocks provisions include obligations to maintain major fish stocks prescribed by regulation at levels necessary to promote their sustainability and to develop and implement rebuilding plans for stocks that have declined to or below their limit reference point.
- DFO staff presented the proposal to list Jayko and Halokvik Arctic char stocks as major fish stocks to the Cambridge Bay Arctic Char IFMP Working Group in June 2023. The Ekaluktutiak HTO indicated support for the proposal.
- DFO staff presented the proposal to list Ijaruvung Lake, Iqalugaarjuit (Iqalujjuaq Fiord), and Irvine Inlet Arctic char stocks as major fish stocks to the Pangnirtung HTO in July 2023 and are awaiting notification from the HTO regarding their support.
- Additionally, DFO's Domestic Fisheries Policy group identified the shrimp stocks proposed for listing in this second batch at the February 2023 meeting of the Northern Shrimp Advisory Committee.
- Seeking feedback on this proposed regulatory amendment is a step in the regulatory process. The formal regulatory process will provide another opportunity to submit feedback on the proposed list of fish stocks once the draft regulation is published in *Canada Gazette*, Part I. Currently there is no timeline for that publication step.

- Additional feedback or questions on the proposed regulatory amendment can be sent to DFO's regional coordinator, Adrienne McLean, at Adrienne.McLean@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act Import Provisions

- Over the past several years, DFO has worked with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on comparability finding applications for our commercial fishing operations to permit export of fish and fish products to the United States.
- After several delays, NOAA is now expected to provide nations with their final comparability finding results by November 30, 2023. The comparability finding applications included information on regulatory programs governing the bycatch of marine mammals for NOAA to verify a comparable level of effectiveness to U.S. regulations.
- Co-management organizations and stakeholders will be provided with updates on the results of our comparability finding applications as they become available.

Ghost Gear Program

- In 2023, the Ghost Gear Program in the Arctic Region has teamed up with four Inuit communities and one commercial fisher on Great Slave Lake to conduct seven cleanup projects targeting Ghost Gear (abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear) and one community outreach project working on education on Ghost Gear. Over \$80,000 has been allocated to these activities resulting in the hiring of nearly 40 community members to collect and properly dispose of Ghost Gear in their communities.

Prepared by: Fisheries Management, Arctic Region – Fisheries & Oceans Canada

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