

SUBMISSION TO THE
NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD
FEBRUARY 2025

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 2023/24 harvest season were: Jones Sound 39, Smith Sound 0, Northern Hudson Bay 188, Somerset Island 103, East Baffin Island 122, Admiralty Inlet 247, and Eclipse Sound 145.
- A photographic survey to estimate Northern Hudson Bay (NHB) narwhal abundance occurred in August 2024 and will add an abundance estimate to the time-series, allowing for development of a Limit Reference Point (LRP). An LRP marks the boundary between the cautious and critical zones under DFO's Sustainable Fisheries Framework, and the Framework requires the development of LRPs for key regional fisheries. LRP development for NHB narwhal will continue in 2024/25, with anticipated completion by end of 2025/26.
- A judicial review concerning Baffin Bay narwhal management units was initiated in late 2022 by the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board (QWB) and four Qikiqtaaluk Hunters and Trappers Organizations/Associations (HTOs/HTAs). This judicial review is still in process.
- Following confirmation of season dates and allocations for 2024/25, narwhal tags (including carry-over tags) and information packages were distributed to all harvesting communities in the spring/summer of 2024.
- Consultations on DFO Science advice regarding Baffin Bay narwhal were recently conducted with the communities and HTAs in Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet in February and June 2024, respectively. [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.
- A Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) peer-review meeting will be held on January 14, 2025, regarding "Considerations for a New Management System: Sustainability of Narwhal in Northern and Eastern Baffin Island". Co-managers have been invited to participate.

- A CSAS peer-review meeting is anticipated for spring 2025 to update abundance estimates and sustainable harvest level advice for Baffin Bay narwhal stocks.
- The Nunavut Narwhal Working Group continues to work on its collaborative review and update of the *Integrated Fisheries Management Plan (IFMP) for Narwhal in the Nunavut Settlement Area*. The most recent Narwhal Working Group meeting was held in February 2024. DFO looks forward to ongoing participation from the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) at these Working Group meetings.
- In planning for the 2025/26 narwhal harvest season, DFO requests that Hunters and Trappers Organizations/Associations (HTOs/HTAs) return both the used and unused tags and harvest sheets from 2024/25 by the close of the season (March 31, 2025).
- Prior to distributing 2025 harvest tags, 2024 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 subsistence landings for walrus within the Nunavut Settlement Area for the 2023/24 season is currently 12. However, 2023/24 walrus harvest reports have not yet been provided to DFO from most communities throughout Nunavut.
- The total reported landings of walrus by sport hunters in 2023/24 was 27.
- Following a decision by the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board to discontinue their Interim Walrus Sport Hunt Policy after the 2023 season, the Nunavut Walrus Working Group co-developed a new licensing process for use starting in 2024. Under the new Walrus Sport Hunt Licensing Process in the Nunavut Settlement Area, walrus will continue to be sustainably harvested by Inuit and sport hunters while providing economic benefits to Nunavut communities.
- The 2024/25 fiscal year was the first season utilizing the new licensing process, which allowed for quicker application approvals compared to previous years.
- Following the new process outlined above, 137 walrus sport hunts were approved for 2024 (Arviat 4, Coral Harbour 62, Igloolik 25, Iqaluit 3, Pangnirtung 3, Pond Inlet 7, Rankin Inlet 3, and Sanirajak 30). Ultimately, 71 walrus sport hunt licences were issued and DFO has received reports of 27 successful 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.
- In planning for next year's 2025/26 walrus sport hunting season, all three RWOs have confirmed their preference for DFO to process walrus sport hunt applications within their region. The processing of applications involves issuing a call for applications to HTOs and outfitters in addition to reviewing applications. A call for 2025 walrus sport hunt applications was distributed on November 14, 2024, with a submission deadline of February 21, 2025.

- A CSAS peer-review meeting to update abundance estimates for high Arctic Atlantic walrus stocks is scheduled for January 28-29, 2025.

3. Beluga

- The total reported landings for beluga within the Nunavut Settlement Area for the 2023/24 season is currently 193. However, 2023/24 beluga harvest reports have not yet been provided to DFO from most communities throughout Nunavut.
- The Cumberland Sound Beluga (CSB) Working Group continues to meet and work towards sustainable management of beluga by reviewing historical material, identifying current knowledge gaps, and through the application of the best available *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ) and scientific knowledge.
- The most recent CSB Working Group meeting was held in Pangnirtung on October 16, 2024. Co-management partners provided updates to the community and answered questions during a public meeting later the same day. The next CSB Working Group meeting will be held virtually on February 12, 2025, followed by in-person working group and community meetings in Pangnirtung in June 2025. DFO acknowledges the ongoing participation of the NWMB at the CSB Working Group and community meetings.
- DFO looks forward to continued collaboration with co-management partners to ensure the sustainable management of the Cumberland Sound Beluga population by working towards developing an IFMP.
- A CSB Hunt Coordinator team (boat captain and assistant) was hired for the 2024 harvest to support the Pangnirtung HTO in monitoring the hunt and ensuring the quota is followed. The CSB Working Group would like to see additional hunt coordinators hired for 2025 to provide more coverage for the large hunt area. With support from DFO staff, the Pangnirtung HTO has applied for funding for increased monitoring through the [DFO Indigenous Fishery Monitoring Fund](#).

4. Bowhead

a. 2024 Bowhead Hunts:

- The Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of Eastern Canada-West Greenland (ECWG) bowhead whales in Nunavut waters is 5 per year. This TAH is shared regionally: 2 per year in each of the Qikiqtaaluk and Kivalliq Regions, and 1 per year in the Kitikmeot Region.
- In 2024, the QWB approved the Bowhead Hunt Plans submitted by Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet, however both of these hunts were ultimately cancelled.
- In 2024, the Kivalliq Wildlife Board (KWB) approved the Bowhead Hunt Plans submitted by Coral Harbour and Nauyasat. Following completion of penthrate grenade training by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), DFO issued a Marine

Mammal Fishing Licence to the Coral Harbour and Naujaat Bowhead Hunt Captains.

- In 2024, the Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB) informed DFO that they did not receive interest from any Kitikmeot communities to host a bowhead hunt and therefore no host community was selected.
 - DFO has received harvest information and biological samples from the 2024 bowhead hunt in Naujaat. DFO thanks the hunters for providing biological samples from this whale for analysis.
 - Unfortunately, Coral Harbour has not provided DFO with any hunt information (date/location of harvest and sex/length of the whale), datasheets, or biological samples collected from their bowhead harvest in 2024. It is very important that the Coral Harbour Hunt Captain share this information with DFO as soon as possible so that the limited information provided from memory by the HTO Manager can be confirmed.
 - DFO emphasizes the importance of timely and accurate marine mammal harvest reports for all species, including bowhead whales.
- b. Bowhead Co-Management:
- DFO's Sustainable Fisheries Framework requires the development of Limit Reference Points (LRP) for key regional fisheries. LRPs have not yet been developed for the ECWG bowhead fishery, because aerial surveys cannot include their vast geographic range.
 - Updated abundance estimates for ECWG bowhead whales have been developed recently from genetic mark-recapture data ([Frasier et al. 2020](#), [Biddlecomb et al. 2023](#)) and [Ferguson et al \(2021\)](#) have proposed a precautionary management approach for ECWG bowheads. ECWG bowheads.
 - In response to a DFO Fisheries Management request for Science Advice, a DFO CSAS process is scheduled for January 27, 2025. Invitations have been sent to Inuit co-management representatives in Nunavut (NWMB and NTI) and in Nunavik [Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) and Makivvik Corporation]. At this meeting, participants will review recent peer-reviewed publications on the ECWG bowhead whale population with respect to abundance estimates and precautionary management approaches, specifically examining LRPs.
 - The CSAS recommendations and conclusions will be presented for review and discussion among Bowhead Working Group members as they co-develop recommendations for an updated bowhead management plan for decision by the NWMB and NMRWB.

5. Harvest Reporting

- Timely and accurate reporting is required under the *Fisheries Act*, *Marine Mammal Regulations*, and the *Nunavut Agreement*. Reports of total marine

mammal hunting mortality (landed and lost) are essential to develop reliable advice on sustainable harvests. It is strongly recommended that co-management organizations emphasize the importance of harvest reporting and monitoring.

- Staff from the Iqaluit DFO office have contacted all Nunavut HTOs/HTAs and Government of Nunavut (GN) Wildlife Office staff requesting mid-year harvest updates for beluga, walrus, narwhal and bowhead whales for the 2024/25 fiscal year which began on April 1, 2024.
- Due to minimal harvesting reporting for the 2023/24 fiscal year that ended on March 31, 2024, DFO staff have also followed up with HTOs and GN Wildlife Office staff regarding 2023/24 harvest reports.
- Additionally, DFO urges continued reporting of unusual marine mammal occurrences and events for follow up by co-management organizations, such as beached carcasses and ice entrapments.

6. Avian Influenza

- Avian Influenza Virus (AIV) is highly contagious among domestic and wild birds. In the fall of 2024, the GN received reports of sick/dead birds observed near several Nunavut communities which also involved sick/dead marine mammals.
- Canada's national surveillance program for AIV includes the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (CWHC), the GN and other provincial/territorial governments, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada – Canadian Wildlife Service.
- In Nunavut, public communications regarding AIV testing are coordinated by the GN (Dept. of Environment and Dept. of Health) and the CWHC.
- In late November 2024, DFO and its partner organizations began to discuss how DFO can best assist in responding to reports of sick/dead marine mammals, in a way that respects existing roles of Federal-Provincial-Territorial departments and partners in the national AIV surveillance program. These meetings will continue in early January 2025, in order to finalize DFO's support role going forward.

Arctic Char:

1. Pangnirtung:

- The 2024/25 summer fishery in Cumberland Sound resulted in a total of approximately 13,424 kg round weight of char reported landed at the Pangnirtung fish plant.
- In 2024, stock assessment data collection began on Opingivik Lake (PG002), one of four commercially fished Arctic char stocks located in Cumberland Sound. Arctic char were also sampled from lakes Kingnait (PG014) and Qasigiyat (PG015) to contribute to an ongoing spatial assessment exploring Arctic char genetic trends through time across a wide range.

- From each of the sampled sites in 2024, some stomachs were preserved from sampled Arctic char to contribute to a diet analysis study.
- Arctic char previously tagged at PG027, Iqalugaarjuit Fiord (formerly known as Iqalujjuaq Fiord), in 2021, 2022, and 2023 continue to be caught and returned by fishers. Tagged Arctic char returned in 2024 are currently being processed by DFO staff, with assessment of the mark-recapture data to begin in the upcoming months.

2. Kivalliq:

- The 2024/25 summer commercial Arctic char harvest in the Kivalliq region was approximately 9,754 kg (round weight) reported landed at Kivalliq Arctic Foods in Rankin Inlet.
- In 2024, the second year of an acoustic telemetry project occurred in Rankin Inlet with continued support and study design input from the Kangiqliniq HTO.
- DFO tagged 63 Arctic char and 19 Greenland cod in the Rankin Inlet area with small acoustic transmitters to track species movements. So far, community fishers have recaptured 20 tagged Arctic char and 1 tagged Greenland cod.
- With the assistance of two local technicians, various instruments were deployed in the marine environment around Rankin Inlet including acoustic receivers to record the movement of tagged fish, a hydrophone to record ship traffic, temperature and light recorders, and instruments to assess marine microplastic levels.
- The acoustic receivers that were deployed in 2023 were also recovered. Information on fish movement will be shared with the community when it is available.
- The study on Arctic char diet, muscle colour, and marine microplastic first started in 2021 was continued in 2024, with 50 sea-run Arctic char captured from the Diana River.
- DFO also collected 38 Greenland cod, 26 sculpin, and 71 capelin from the Rankin Inlet area to assess levels of marine microplastics. Results from this work will be shared with the community when they are available.

3. Cambridge Bay:

- A pre-season fishery meeting was held in June 2024 at the Kitikmeot Foods Ltd. fish plant. DFO Fisheries Management staff met with fishers and provided a refresher on the importance of logbooks to record catch-per-unit effort, bycatch, and discard information.
- Arctic char commercial harvest occurred at five sites in the 2024 summer/fall harvest season at Ekalluk, Halokvik (30-Mile), Jayko, Surrey, and Lauchlan Rivers. A total of 42,453 kg (round weight) was harvested.
- DFO is planning an IFMP Working Group meeting and post-season fishery meeting this winter.
- The Cambridge Bay commercial plant sampling program was once again successful this past summer in providing DFO with biological data and samples

from 200 Arctic char from three of the five locations that were commercially fished. This is the longest-running program of its kind in Nunavut, spanning five decades, and has formed the backbone of stock assessments for the region.

- Recent genetic and telemetry results have suggested that the Cambridge Bay Arctic char commercial fishery is a mixed-stock fishery. Discussions will occur over the winter on the most appropriate approach for managing a mixed-stock fishery and what studies would be most valuable for informing future management decisions.

Greenland Halibut (Turbot):

1. Cumberland Sound Turbot Management Area (CSTMA):

- The 2024 winter Greenland halibut fishery in Cumberland Sound occurred from February to April, with a total of approximately 290 t (round weight) landed at the Pangnirtung fish plant. Approximately 300 fishery-dependent biological fish samples were collected throughout the 2024 winter fishery and 120 additional commercially harvested fish were sent to DFO for sampling.
- DFO issued a licence in early August 2024 for open-water summer fishing in Cumberland Sound, but no landings were ultimately reported.
- DFO staff are planning in-person pre-season meetings in Pangnirtung in January 2025 prior to the start of the 2025 winter fishery.
- DFO Science is using a Baited Remote Underwater Video system to estimate the number of Greenland Sharks in Cumberland Sound, to assess the impact of fishery bycatch mortality on the Greenland Shark population. The project started in 2023 and is planned to continue into 2026.
- With support from the Pangnirtung HTO, the Ocean Tracking Network (OTN) has deployed a line of fish tracking moorings across Cumberland Sound to detect tagged Greenland halibut as they leave the Sound. Data will be used to estimate the rate of emigration from Cumberland Sound to better understand connectivity with Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) Division 0B.

2. Division 0A Inshore:

- With support from the Nangmoutaq HTO, DFO issued a licence in the spring of 2024 for on-ice Greenland halibut fishing in the Clyde River area. The licence was issued for 3 t of the available 100 t of quota allocated for inshore fishing within the NAFO Division 0A. Approximately 1.7 t of Greenland halibut was ultimately landed and biological samples/data such as length and weight were collected from 200 fish by local fishers and sent to DFO scientists.
- DFO has received interest in accessing inshore Greenland halibut quota in 2025. DFO is working with interested fishers on the licence application process and preparing for the upcoming fishing season.
- DFO will continue to work with co-managers and fishers regarding future fishing of the 100 t of NAFO Division 0A inshore Greenland halibut quota.

Fish Stocks Provisions:

- DFO has received feedback on a proposal for a regulatory amendment to the *Fishery (General) Regulations* to identify the second batch of major fish stocks in spring 2025 (tentative) that would be subject to the Fish Stocks provisions (sections 6.1-6.3) of the *Fisheries Act*. This includes Arctic char stocks in Cambridge Bay and Cumberland Sound and northern and striped shrimp in the Eastern Assessment Zone (EAZ).
- The Fish Stocks provisions include obligations to maintain major fish stocks identified in 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 this proposal to the Cambridge Bay Arctic Char IFMP Working Group in June 2023 and the Pangnirtung HTO Board in July 2023, with general support for identifying Cumberland Sound and Cambridge Bay char stocks as major fish stocks.
 - If these stocks are prescribed to the Fish Stocks provisions, there would be no immediate management changes as the stocks are considered healthy and the current management of the fishery is sustainable.
- DFO staff also requested feedback on this proposal at the KRWB and QWB Annual General Meetings in 2023 and 2024 and no concerns were expressed.
- The proposal to identify these stocks as major fish stocks was also pre-published in *Canada Gazette*, Part I, on October 12, 2024, for a 30-day public comment period that ended on November 11, 2024. No concerns were expressed regarding identifying these Arctic char or EAZ shrimp stocks as major during this public comment period.
- The current proposed timeline to include these stocks in the regulation through publication of *Canada Gazette*, Part II is by spring 2025, before the next scheduled NWMB meeting in June.
- Recent information regarding northern shrimp in the EAZ suggests that this stock is part of a larger stock complex, and thus the current stock area description and associated Limit Reference Point may no longer be applicable. Given this recent information, consultation with stakeholders and rightsholders would need to occur before identifying this stock as major with the new proposed stock structure. Northern shrimp in the EAZ is thus being proposed for removal from the second batch of major fish stocks.

Ghost Gear Program:

- The DFO Ghost Gear Program was established in 2019 with the goal of eliminating abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear, also known as ghost gear.
- The program is currently developing the *Canadian Ghost Gear Action Plan* that is due in 2027 and will outline concrete actions to address ghost gear in Canada.

- Ongoing engagement and consultations are a key part of developing the Action Plan. In 2024, the Ghost Gear Program completed the following activities in the Arctic Region:
 - Held two Arctic Region virtual Program Update Meetings which were attended by government and non-government organizations, HTOs, and fishery stakeholders;
 - Launched the second year of the Ghost Gear Community Clean-Up program where communities in the region were able to apply for funding to perform shore-line clean-up projects in and around community fishing areas;
 - An online survey was made available to the public from October 28 to November 30, 2024, with the purpose of collecting public, stakeholder, and rightsholder opinions on the Ghost Gear program and Ghost Gear in Canada.
 - Announced the 2nd International Gear Summit on ghost gear and whale safe gear to be held on February 25 and 26, 2025 in Moncton, New Brunswick. The Summit will be invitation only, so if you or your organization are interested in attending, please let us know at DFO.GGProgram-ProgrammeEF.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

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