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Pangnirtung Hunters & Trappers Organization

SUBMISSION TO THE  
NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD (NWMB)

Regular Meeting No. RM 001-2026

FOR

Information:

Decision:

Issue: *Pangnirtung HTA Beluga Harvesting By-laws to be Implemented in 2026*

Background:

The mandate of the Pangnirtung Hunters and Trappers Association (PHTA) to manage the harvesting of beluga whales in Cumberland Sound is derived from the following Nunavut Agreement sections, and other sections of the Agreement:

- 5.1.1 defines "basic needs level" as the level of harvesting by Inuit identified in Sections 5.6.19 to 5.6.25
- 5.1.2(e) explicitly recognizes "Inuit systems of wildlife management", while other potential management systems (e.g., scientific systems) are not mentioned in Article 5.
- 5.7.3 gives powers and functions to HTOs (e.g., the Pangnirtung HTA) to manage their community basic needs level and general aspects of harvesting of wildlife by an HTO's community members, including the allocation of community basic needs levels and non-quota limitations among its members.
- 5.7.8. enables each HTO to develop and adopt by-laws guiding its operations.

Other sections of the Nunavut Agreement may also affect these basic powers of the Pangnirtung HTA to manage beluga harvesting by its members.

On December 12, 2012, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) decided that the basic needs levels of beluga and some other marine mammals would equal the total allowable harvest as established and modified by the NWMB from time to time.

During October 2010 to June 2011, the NWMB reviewed proposals by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to list beluga in Cumberland Sound as "threatened" under the Species at Risk



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Act. The NWMB did not support the listing. The DFO Minister ultimately rejected decisions of the NWMB and listed the beluga in Cumberland Sound as “threatened” in 2011.

During the listing process, an especially contentious issue, among several, was centered at the intersection of science vs. Inuit systems of wildlife manage and Inuit Qaujimaqatungit (I.Q). Based on generations of IQ and more recent Inuit testimony, the Pangnirtung HTA emphasized that two separate beluga populations have been found within Cumberland Sound for many human generations. That IQ-based position was rejected by the DFO Minister, contrary to subsection 5.12(e) of the Nunavut Agreement. On the other hand, the NWMB in 2011 found that the IQ supporting the HTA’s position was “reliable and persuasive”.

After requests from the Pangnirtung HTA, in 2022 DFO conducted genetic analyses of samples taken from beluga whales in Cumberland Sound. In December 2022, DFO presented the genetic results to the Cumberland Sound Beluga Working Group. Of 24 samples evaluated, the majority were from the Cumberland Sound beluga (CSB) population (74%). The remainder (26%) were most similar to whales from the Western Hudson Bay beluga (WHB) population. It is unknown whether or not these proportions based on genetic results from each population are representative of either the total beluga harvest in Cumberland Sound, or of the relative abundances of the two populations in the Sound, or of neither of these components.

The genetic classification of the beluga is generally consistent with IQ. Note that the two populations within Cumberland Sound are referred to differently in the PHTA’s current harvesting by-laws to be consistent with local references. The “Clearwater” beluga in the PHTA’s by-laws are larger animals and concentrate in the area of Clearwater Fiord during early summer, and appear to be comparable to CSB whales from the DFO genetic analyses. On the other hand, the “small” beluga in the PHTA’s current by-laws occur mainly on the south side of Cumberland Sound mainly east of Irvine Inlet and appear to be very similar to WHB whales based on ancestral and current IQ, and as suggested by DFO’s recent genetic analyses.

In June 2023, DFO confirmed that there is no quota or total allowable harvest for WHB beluga. The current quota or basic needs level for beluga in Cumberland Sound is 41. DFO has applied the current and past quotas to all beluga harvested in Cumberland Sound, which the Inuit of Pangnirtung and their HTA have objected to since the quotas were first imposed by DFO. DFO’s application of the quota to all belugas in Cumberland Sound is inconsistent with the occurrence of two populations within the Sound, one of which (i.e., WHB) has no quota across most of its range which is outside of the Sound.

Inuit harvesters in Pangnirtung can determine which population that a harvested beluga may come from based on physical size and other characteristics, and this information will be collected in future.

In an email message sent to the Cumberland Sound Beluga Working Group in March 2024 by DFO staff, both the NWMB and DFO reportedly support management of beluga in Pangnirtung by Inuit-based community management systems. This would be in accordance with sub-section 5.1.2(e) of the Nunavut Agreement.

## *Approval of Revised PHTA Beluga Harvesting By-laws in 2024 and Implementation in 2026*

After an IQ workshop (see Consultations below) in February 2023, the current beluga harvesting by-laws were revised and passed at the Annual General Meeting of the Pangnirtung HTA in December 2024. Implementation of the revised by-laws was delayed until 2026, while PHTA staffing levels were reviewed.

Pertinent revisions of the Pangnirtung HTA's Beluga By-laws are as follows:

### **2.1.2 Harvest Limitations for Clearwater Beluga**

- (a) The total annual allocation for harvesting of Clearwater beluga is 41 while Clearwater beluga may be outside of the Clearwater Beluga Conversation Area. The harvest year begins on April 1 and ends on March 31 of the following calendar year.
- (b) Each HTA member will be limited to a maximum of one Clearwater beluga annually, provided that the total quota for Clearwater beluga has not been reached.

### **2.2.2 Elimination of Harvest Limitations on Smaller Beluga in Cumberland Sound**

Harvesting of smaller beluga in Cumberland Sound will not be limited by quota.

### **2.2.3 Reporting the Type of Each Beluga Harvested in Cumberland Sound**

As per section 3.5 below, each harvester must record and report the type of beluga that he or she may have harvested.

In 2026, the Pangnirtung HTA plans to hire an Assistant Manager to help record the beluga harvest information described above in by-law section 2.2.3.

### **Consultations:**

The Pangnirtung HTA held a beluga by-law workshop during February 27-28, 2023. The workshop was attended by Pangnirtung HTA Board members, local beluga experts, two representatives of the Amaruk HTA in Iqaluit, and the Director of Wildlife and Environment from the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board.

Amaruk HTA representatives helped to address two specific topics, as well as other potential management issues and processes. No regular overlap of beluga harvesting in Cumberland Sound by Iqaluit hunters was apparent. Also, based on IQ, the small beluga in Cumberland Sound seem to be similar to the type of beluga harvested by Iqaluit harvesters in Frobisher Bay. Large beluga similar to Clearwater whales were rarely, if ever, seen in Frobisher Bay.

The NWMB could not provide detailed records of public hearings and other consultations for the past establishment and modifications of the total allowable harvest and non-quota limitations for beluga in Cumberland Sound. Reportedly, the NWMB advised the Pangnirtung HTA that the quota (presumably a total allowable harvest) for Cumberland Sound increased from 35 to 41 in 2000. The NWMB could not provide the Pangnirtung HTA with a record of public consultations leading to that decision, or to the decisions that led to the previous quota level of 35, or other potential prior quotas.

According to records of the Cumberland Sound Beluga Working Group in March 2024, both NWMB and DFO support management of beluga in Pangnirtung by Inuit-based community management systems, as long as management details are shared with NWMB and DFO. This would be in compliance with sub-section 5.1.2(e) of the Nunavut Agreement.

In addition to other Inuit beluga management meetings, representatives of the Pangnirtung HTA and the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board have participated in meetings of the Cumberland Sound Beluga Management Working Group sponsored by DFO since at least 2017.

This Briefing Note and the attached current Cumberland Sound beluga harvesting by-laws are provided to the NWMB and DFO to respond to the DFO's expressed request for sharing of management details.

**Prepared by:** Michael Ferguson *(at the request of the Board of Directors of the Pangnirtung HTA, and as supported by the Executive Committee of the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board)*

**Date:** January 16, 2026