



**SUBMISSION TO THE**

**NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**FOR**

**Information:**

**Decision: X**

**Issue:** Adjusting Polar Bear Total Allowable Harvests to a 1:1 Male to Female Sex Ratio along with a simpler credit calculation system.

**Background:**

- The main objective of the Nunavut polar bear management system has been to increase or maintain polar bear subpopulations. However, over the past several years communities have been raising concerns over the increased abundance of polar bears. In particular, community members voiced their concerns about public safety. There has been a shift in community support for increased populations and most Nunavummiut would rather see a properly managed decrease in polar bear numbers in order to address public safety concerns.
- During the consultations for the existing polar bear Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) the issue of non-sex-selective harvesting was discussed as an option.
- All communities agreed to harvest sex-selectively with the signing of the last Polar Bear MOUs in 2005 as it allowed for a higher Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) while still allowing for a sustainable harvest level. The issue was discussed during the consultations.

**Current Status:**

- The Department of Environment (DOE) participated in the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) public hearing for the Nunavut Polar Bear Co-Management Plan in Iqaluit from November 13-16, 2018.
- The participants in the public hearing, mostly comprised of representatives from Nunavut communities and Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs), were very clear and consistent in conveying the message that the current management of polar bear needs to be improved to reflect community values and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ).

- The specific components of polar bear management that was criticized the most was the current practice, for all but one subpopulation, of a 2:1 harvest sex ratio (two males harvested for every female) and the flexible quota system.
  - Communities have concerns that too many males being harvested due to the sex ratio will cause an imbalance in the population.
  - Communities feel that the current flexible quota system is overly punitive and communities that experience a high number of problem bears are at an extreme disadvantage. Many people have expressed that the calculation process for the flexible quota system is difficult to understand.
- The Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation currently has a 1:1 harvest sex ratio. This was recommended based on the data collected during the most recent population assessment, which indicated that the proportion of males in the population was low and could lead to a conservation concern.
- Even if the final decision is to remove the sex-selective component of the management system at this time, we would note that the use of sex selectivity as a polar bear management tool remains an option for the future. Following the collection of updated subpopulation information (e.g. population inventories, harvest risk assessments, etc.), the use of sex-selectivity could be included as part of management recommendations to address conservation concerns going forward.
- As a change to the sex-selectivity of the polar bear harvest is not a change to the TAH, the current accumulated credits in each community would not be zeroed.

### **Consultations:**

The GN held several rounds of consultations between 2014 and 2016 during the process of developing the polar bear management plan. In addition, the topic was also discussed during NWMB public hearing held in Iqaluit from November 13-16, 2018.

### **Recommendations:**

1. DOE recommends that for all polar bear subpopulations in Nunavut, a harvest sex ratio of up to 50% females should be adopted; communities can use up to 50% of their allocated tags to harvest female bears.
2. DOE recommends that the credit system will be based on a one bear reduction for one bear over-harvest basis:
  - a. An overharvest of one female, over 50% of the tag allocation in one year, would reduce a community tag allocation by one tag in the following year.
  - b. Males can be harvested up to the limit of the tag allocation. An overharvest of males, over the tag allocation, would result in a reduction of the same amount of tags the following year.

- c. Accumulated credits can continue to be used to offset an overharvest, instead of a reduction in the following years tag allocation.
  - d. Cubs will be considered as one-half male tag.
- 3. DOE recommends that the changes to harvest sex-selectivity and the credit system be implemented effective in the current harvest season (2018-19).