

Makivik Corporation Report for NAMMCO Scientific Committee Annual Meeting November 2018

Beluga

Beluga whales have been harvested by Nunavik Inuit for millennia for subsistence purposes. Nunavik Inuit harvest from primarily two stocks; Eastern Hudson Bay (EHB) beluga and Western Hudson Bay (WHB) beluga. While the two stocks summer in discrete areas, both stocks share spring and autumn migration routes and overwinter jointly in Hudson Strait and the Labrador Sea. Commercial whaling during the 1800's severely depleted the EHB stock, for which a conservation concern has currently been identified. The WHB has no conservation concern.

Makivik and the Makivik-owned Nunavik Research Centre (NRC) collaborate with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) on the monitoring of the subsistence beluga harvest by Nunavik Inuit. The NRC prepares and distributes the sampling kits to communities and coordinates payments to Nunavik hunters who return the samples. Wildlife technicians at the NRC also use the sampled teeth to age the beluga whales. DFO uses the maqtaq/skin sample for genetic analysis for stock identification, and in some years, for examining for presence of parasites or contamination. Furthermore, the NRC toxicologist has worked with beluga samples to test for the presence of heavy metals (Pb, Hg, Cd, Se) in meat and maqtaq.

The current 3-year Total Allowable Take (TAT) for beluga harvested in Nunavik expires in 2020. Makivik is a member of a newly established Nunavik Beluga Working Group to explore alternative ways of collecting and analyzing information (including Inuit Knowledge) to help provide input into the next iteration of management decisions by the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) the Institution of Public Government tasked with establishing beluga whale TAT. Discussion of better monitoring of whale migration, behaviour, and the use of biopsy darting to obtain genetic samples as well as using remote sensing to determine abundance are currently underway.

Walrus

The NRC undertakes a sampling program with Nunavik walrus harvesters to test for the presence of *Trichinella* in walrus meat. This longstanding program allows Nunavik Inuit to know that the meat is safe to eat. Hunters send in a sample of the tongue which is then analyzed by trained NRC staff. Usually, results can be returned to the communities within 48 hours of the samples being received by the NRC

The Government of Canada will undertake consultations with Nunavik Inuit as part of their effort to assess the status of walrus under the federal Species at Risk Act. Makivik will be involved in validating and approving the consultation process and will provide input about the proposed listing.

DFO also works with Makivik on any scientific studies that DFO might be considering in Nunavik. Some recent initiatives have included proposed aerial surveys of eastern Hudson Bay and remote monitoring of haul-out sites by cameras in order to determine frequency of walrus hauling out to input into aerial survey analysis detection functions. However, the remote sensing initiative resulted in negative reactions from local walrus harvesters due to the proximate communities feeling it resulted in walrus being displaced from the area due to the presence of the equipment. The camera and supporting structure were subsequently dismantled.

Bowhead

Although there is an annual TAT of two bowhead whales for Nunavik Inuit there was no bowhead whale hunt conducted by Nunavimmiut this year. At this point in time, it is not known when and where the next hunt will take place. In the interim, Makivik has acquired a harpoon gun from Alaska

that will replace the current one (which has design flaws) and which equally uses the approved penthrite grenades obtained from Norway.

Narwhal

Nunavik Inuit very occasionally harvest narwhal, although it has been noted that observations around Nunavik are increasing.

Makivik and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. have renewed the narwhal tag transfer agreement, which allows for narwhal tags that have gone unused in Nunavik to be transferred to Nunavut communities the following year.

Ringed Seal

Despite observations from Nunavik Inuit that ringed seal populations in some areas (Ungava Bay, Hudson Strait) are not doing well, there is no dedicated research effort from DFO to better understand the status of these populations. Makivik continues to press DFO to undertake such work.

Orca

Similar to observations in other marine areas in Northern Canada, Nunavik Inuit have noted a significant increase in the numbers of Orca in the waters around Nunavik. They can now be found, on occasion, in Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, and Ungava Bay. Nunavik Inuit believe that Orcas are altering beluga behaviour, with beluga increasingly moving further up estuaries and into thick ice when orca are near.

Minke Whales

Nunavik Inuit are noting an increased presence of Minke whales, primarily in the Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay area.