



Atlantic Walrus



Background

Atlantic walrus (Odobenus rosmarus rosmarus) have been divided into two populations, one east of Greenland and one in western Greenland and Canada. They occur throughout the eastern Canadian Arctic. Four stocks have been identified in Canada (Fig. 1): South and East Hudson Bay (SEHB), Hudson Bay-Davis Strait (HDBS), Foxe Basin (FB), and Baffin Bay (BB). The Maritime stock that once extended south to Nova Scotia is considered to have been extirpated.

In Canada, the main period of commercial harvesting started in the late 1800s and continued well into the 1900s (Rever 1873). Commercial hunting of walrus was banned in 1929 by the Walrus Protection Regulations (Richard and Campbell 1985).

Walrus hunting is subject to the terms of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and is legislated under the Marine Mammal Regulations of the Fisheries Act. Currently an Indian or Inuk can take, without license, 4 walrus per year unless there is a community quota (Section 26). Current community quotas are: Coral Harbour - 60; Southbay - 10; Arviq Bay - 10; and Clyde River - 20. Non-Aboriginals may take walrus only when licensed under Marine Mammal Regulations or Aboriginal Commercial Fishing License Regulations. Sport hunting for walrus are becoming increasingly popular. Walrus are not in any CITES category. Domestic transport of walrus parts from Nunavut and among provinces is permitted under DFO permit, and international trade is permitted under CITES (walrus are listed on CITES Appendix III). The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board is currently reviewing the quota system and considering new ways of managing the walrus hunt. This assessment is being done in support of these management discussions.

Summary

- Between 1997 and 2001, hunters reported the average annual kill (rounded) for each stock as: South and East Hudson Bay - 4/year; Hudson Bay-Davis Strait - 48/year; Foxe Basin - 140/year; Baffin Bay - 9/year. Records are incomplete, and are not corrected for hunting losses. Sequential five year harvest averages for all stocks have declined over the last 20 years. Hunters attribute this to a decreased use of dog teams and/or other factors.
- The few existing studies of struck-and-lost rates estimate rates of 30-32%. Struck-and-lost rates likely vary with season, weather, location, hunter experience, and animal behaviour. Hunters believe loss rates are low (1-5%).
- Scientific evidence for stock identity is based on distribution and genetic and lead isotope data; four distinct stocks have been identified: South and East Hudson Bay (SEHB), Hudson Bay-Davis Strait (HDBS), Foxe Basin (FB), and Baffin Bay (BB). These four stocks may be complexes.
- There are no complete or modern estimates of numbers for any walrus stock in Nunavut; index estimates available for some stocks have broad confidence intervals and cannot be corrected for submerged animals or haulout dynamics; only very large changes in population size would be detectable; current estimates of stock size are: South and East Hudson Bay - a few hundreds; Hudson Bay-Davis Strait stock complex (includes northern Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, Davis Strait, and west Greenland) - 5500; Foxe Basin - 5500; Baffin Bay - 1,700-2,000.
- Reviews of walrus distribution indicate that walrus have disappeared from many