

Makivik Corporation Report for
NAMMCO Management Committee
Meetings and the Meeting of the Council
Oslo, Norway, March 17, 2020

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. For 2019, 139 samples were provided by Nunavik communities for analyses.

The current 3-year Total Allowable Take (TAT, or quota) for beluga harvested in Nunavik expired in February of 2020. The Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB), established and mandated by the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement, held the first-ever public hearing in Nunavik for establishing a TAT for beluga whales. After hearing evidence from DFO, Makivik, and Nunavik Inuit, the NMRWB is now in its decision-making process, and a decision from the board is expected to be sent to the federal minister for DFO in the near future.

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 24 hours of the samples being received by the NRC. For 2019, 29 walrus samples were analyzed, and all samples tested negative for the presence of *Trichinella*.

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 been resupplied with ten more penthrite grenades so that we are fully prepared for when the next hunt will occur.

Narwhal

Nunavik Inuit very occasionally harvest narwhal, although it has been noted that observations around Nunavik are increasing. The NMRWB has established a TAT of ten narwhal for Nunavik Inuit. However, given how seldom narwhal are harvested in Nunavik, Makivik and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. have a 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 (increase in disease and possible declining population), there is no dedicated research effort from DFO or academia to better understand the status of these populations. However, the NMRWB has partnered with the Nunavik Research Centre and three Nunavik communities to establish a community-based monitoring program. The project aims to collect data on ringed seal health, condition, and diet. Aside from morphometric measurements, seals are also analyzed for parasites and contaminants. Furthermore, part of the project is devoted to training youth, with some of the dissection taking place in local schools.

Harp Seal

Nunavik Inuit have observed an increasing number of Harp Seals. Whereas in past years, harp seals were only observed in the Ungava Bay area, they now can be seen in large numbers in Hudson Strait, and, increasingly, in Hudson Bay.

Orca

Similar to observations in other marine areas of Northern Canada, Nunavik Inuit have noted a significant increase in the numbers of Orca in the waters around Nunavik. They can now be found, regularly, 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.