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MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

NAMMCO/29/APR/ MA-2021	ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS MAKIVIK CORPORATION – 2021
Submitted by	Makivik Corporation
Action requested	For information
Background/content	

Makivik Corporation Report for
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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 are thought to 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 by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). 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 contaminants. 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. Between May 2021 and November 2021, the NRC received 77 beluga samples back from local hunters.

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. Between October 2020 and September 2021, the NRC received 38 walrus tongues for *Trichinella* testing. All these tongues sent in by hunters tested negative for this harmful parasite and the meat was deemed safe for human consumption.

The NRC received funding from ArcticNet in April 2021 to start a research project on the walrus population in Nunavik. The project will be starting in February 2022 with interviews in 5 communities of Nunavik (one from Nunavut) with local hunters and elders. This project will help us better understand how Nunavik's walrus population is impacted by climate change.

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 seldomly 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 or academia to better understand the status of these populations. Makivik continues to press DFO to undertake such work. However, the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board is collaborating with hunters and teachers from local communities. Samples are sent to the NRC for the detection of contaminants (mercury), microplastics and parasites (liver flukes, *Toxoplasma gondii* and *Trichinella nativa*). To do so, the NRC has recently acquired PCR and qPCR instrumentation, which will be used to test for *Toxoplasma gondii* in various organs.

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.