



RESOLVED that pursuant to sections 5.6.16, 5.16.17(b), and 5.3.3(a) of the Nunavut Agreement, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board modifies the overall total allowable harvest for the Davis Strait polar bear subpopulation from 61 to 64 polar bears.

FURTHER RESOLVED, to recommend that the Department of Environment lead a working group to propose solutions to issues surrounding the accumulation and use of polar bear harvest credits in Nunavut.

Summary of Evidence and Argument

Input from scientific and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit studies

Between 2005 and 2007, the Government of Nunavut studied the polar bear population in the Davis Strait management unit. At that time, the population seemed stable, but the bears had fewer cubs, and their body condition was declining, possibly due to changes in habitat and increased competition for available food resources. The estimated population size for the 2005 to 2007 study was 2,250 bears.

A recent two-year study conducted in 2017 and 2018, including analysis from previous years, estimated the population size at 2,015 bears for 2017–2018. This suggests that the population may have declined slightly during this period but there was no statistically significant difference between the 2005-2007 and 2017-2018 estimate. The researchers observed during their 2017/2018 study that the bears seemed healthier. In addition, the number of cubs and yearlings per female observed appeared to indicate that there is enough to maintain the population. The survival rates were slightly lower but still within expected ranges, and there did not seem to be any evidence that the bears have been affected by environmental changes like sea-ice conditions.

Concurrently with the 2017–2018 scientific study, Inuit knowledge studies of Davis Strait polar bears were conducted in Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut. In Nunavut, the study was a collaboration between Environment and Climate Change Canada, Polar Knowledge Canada, the Government of Nunavut, and the Hunters and Trappers Organizations in Pangnirtung and Kimmirut. The study revealed that Inuit generally report a healthy polar bear population, marked by increased abundance and stable cub productivity. However, subtle signs of potential changes in polar bear health and habitat were noted, including a slight decline in fatness and occasional reports of hair loss,



along with shifts in prey availability and sea-ice conditions. Participants in the Nunavik study revealed that bears are increasing, raised concerns about human safety and polar bear impacts on other wildlife, such as predation on young seals and eggs in bird colonies.

Harvest records

In 2012, the NWMB and Minister increased the Nunavut total allowable harvest from 42 to 61. The purpose of the increase was to slowly reduce the abundance while maintaining a viable population. The total allowable harvest of 61 was sub-allocated amongst Pangnirtung (24), Kimmirut (9), and Iqaluit (28).

The NWMB reviewed harvest records submitted by the Department of Environment for the Davis Strait polar bear subpopulation. The records show that communities have historically harvested below the total allowable harvest of 61, with an average harvest of 43 polar bears per year (70 percent of the TAH) in the last 12 years (2012–2023). Additionally, since 2012, an annual average of 1–6 bears have been killed every year in defense of life and property¹ (average of 2.5 bears per year).

Harvest credits

In Nunavut, the unharvested portion of each communities' allocation can be carried over into future years as credits. According to the 2019 Nunavut Polar Bear Co-Management Plan and the Harvest Administration and Credit Calculation System (HACCS)², credits accumulate until a new subpopulation estimate is generated and a new total allowable harvest is established. As a result of under-harvesting the total allowable harvests, all Nunavut communities that harvest from Davis Strait have accumulated credits. At the end of the 2022-2023 harvest season, there are a total of 213 credits available for Davis Strait polar bears. Communities have occasionally requested credit tags. Even when approved, these tags often go unused. In 2023, for example, Pangnirtung used none of the 15 credit tags they requested.

¹ The term "Defense of Life and Property Kills" (DLP Kills) refers to the legal killing of a polar bear as a last resort to protect human life or property.

² The purpose of the HACCS is to administer the polar bear harvest management in Nunavut following the decision by NWMB and Minister in 2019 to change the sex-selective harvest ratio from two males for every female (2:1) to up to one female for every male (1:1). HACCS administers the system where communities can accumulate credits for future use when the annual allocation is under-harvested, or in situations where polar bears are over-harvested, for credits to be deducted from the following year's base allocation.

