

# NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

## MINUTES: CONFERENCE CALL No. 54

TUESDAY, 19 December 2000

### Participants on behalf of the NWMB:

Ben Kovic	Chairperson
Makabe Nartok	Member
Kevin McCormick	Member
Gordon Koshinsky	Member
Meeka Mike	Member
Moses Koonoo	Member
David Alagalak	Member
Jim Noble	Executive Director
Michelle Wheatley	Director of Wildlife Management

### Not available for the NWMB:

Joan Scottie	Member
Harry Flaherty	Member

### Other participants:

Stephen Atkinson	DSD Director of Wildlife
Glenn Williams	NTI Wildlife Advisor

### 1. Opening by Chairperson

Ben Kovic opened the Conference Call at 13:05 p.m. Iqaluit time.

### 2. Review/Approval of Agenda

The Board approved **(Resolution 2000- 248)** the Agenda for the Conference Call, with two additions. David Alagalak requested that the Board give consideration to a request from the KWF for authorization to expend approved funds, and Jim Noble requested guidance from the Board on the matter of obtaining the services of a contractor to assist with the forthcoming 10-year planning exercise.

### 3. Polar Bear Quota for M'Clintock Channel Population

Michelle reviewed the briefing note and associated material that she had prepared and assembled for the Board with respect to this issue. She noted that with the exception of reports pertaining to the recent (December 5-6) workshop in

Kugluktuk, most or all of the background material had been seen and discussed by the Board on earlier occasions. In summary:

- The M'Clintock Channel population of polar bears is hunted by the communities of Taloyoak, Gjoa Haven, and Cambridge Bay;
- The population has been managed for sustainability by way of community quotas that incorporate a 2:1 ratio of males: females;
- The quotas currently in effect for these three communities (12, 10 and 10 respectively) were derived with reference to a population estimate of 700 bears;
- The population is one of five that has been certified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to qualify for importation of hunting trophies into the USA. This certification has its basis in US officials being satisfied that the population is being managed responsibly and effectively;
- A three-year study by DSD, funded in part by the NWRT, has indicated that the population is less than half (current best estimate = 288 bears) the number on which the current quotas were/are based;
- Current quotas are not consistent with the principles of conservation;
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will probably move to de-certify the population as qualifying for the importation of hunting trophies.

Michelle concluded (in her briefing note) that, based on the information available, and taking account of the principles of conservation, the objectives for the population (as per the MOU governing its management), and the precautionary principle, a moratorium on hunting this polar bear population was probably the best option. Michelle also recommended that the various other proposals included in the DSD and community briefs be implemented concurrently.

Stephen Atkinson also made reference to the briefing material, and offered the following additional observations and conclusions:

- The science of polar bear mark-and-recapture was much less refined at the time of the original (1978) survey than it is today. It was recognized at the time of the initial (1978) calculations that the derived population estimate of 350 bears was biased low. In consultation with the communities and taking account of their traditional knowledge input, a population estimate of 900 bears was considered more appropriate at that time.
- When the MOUs for polar bear management were being negotiated in 1996, it was generally recognized by all concerned that the population estimate of 900 bears was no longer realistic, and a lower estimate of 700 bears was adopted.
- Many (but certainly not all) participants at the recent workshop in Kugluktuk agreed that there are fewer polar bears in the region now than previously. Some considered the study results to be credible; others did not. Summaries of both the departmental and community perspectives on the workshop are included in the briefing material.
- Workshop participants identified several possible reasons for a reduced abundance of polar bears in the region. These ranged from changes in

ice conditions to possible out-migration of bears. Proposed reasons for any out-migration centred on disturbance, perhaps from increased air traffic, use of snowmobiles, and possibly even the DSD study. Some participants did suggest that hunting could have been a factor.

- In addition to what came forth at the Kugluktuk workshop, some traditional knowledge was collected on earlier occasions from each community. This was summarized for the Board at its September meeting. Elders and hunters have been reasonably consistent in concluding that bears are not abundant in this area.
- There should be no expectation of substantive changes to any of the scientific information or interpretations in the near future.
- The DSD Minister has been considering closing the M'Clintock Channel polar bear hunt as per his prerogative under NLCA 5.3.24.
- The Board is being asked to decide whether the current population estimate for polar bears in M'Clintock Channel, and the recent change in the size of that population referable to that estimate, represent the best available information on this subject. If so, the Board then needs to decide whether to aim for population recovery or merely for stabilization of the population at its current level. The latter would not be consistent with the conservation principles enunciated in the NLCA.
- The only effective course of action to promote population recovery at this time would be a hunting moratorium. The largest annual harvest that would be defensible even on an interim basis would be 8 animals. Any harvest in excess of 8 animals would have some probability of resulting in the extinction of the population. Even a quota of 8 animals, to be defensible, would require the assumption that the population is actually slightly larger (350 animals) than what the preliminary calculations now indicate. It is expected that the population would require over 40 years to recover (to 700 animals) under a harvest regime of this magnitude.
- Defense kills will almost inevitably occur, and need to be taken into account.

Meeka asked about the probability and the mechanics of intervention by the USFWS in this matter. Stephen explained that about five years ago the USFWS examined the available information on Canadian polar bear populations and management regimes. The only available information was and is that which can be (and is) provided by Canada; indeed this information is widely available. On the basis of the information five years ago, the USFWS identified five populations as being sufficiently robust and appropriately managed to warrant certification for the importation of polar bear trophies into the USA. Canada played no role in those decisions, other than providing the information on which they were founded. The five certified populations include the M'Clintock Channel population but not, for instance, the neighbouring Gulf of Boothia population. Just as Canada played no role in deciding which populations the Americans would certify, Canada has no role (other than again providing information) in deciding which populations they may de-certify. There is every indication that a US decision to de-certify the M'Clintock Channel population has already been made, however not yet announced. When announced, it will be for immediate effect.

The decision per se will not prevent American sportsmen from continuing to hunt this population. However none would be expected to do so, both on account of not being able to take their trophies home and also on account of not wanting to hunt from a population perceived to be depleted. The Department is starting to receive enquiries from booking agents, one of whom indicated that he has been in touch with the USFWS. It is expected that current bookings will be cancelled. Any funding deposits that have been made to HTOs will have to be returned.

Ben confirmed that the DSD Minister had expressed to him a willingness to act unilaterally if necessary to curb the M'Clintock Channel polar bear hunt in the interests of conservation, but that he also expressed a strong preference to work bilaterally with the NWMB. Gordon Koshinsky noted that the Board has had the matter under advisement for some time, and suggested that there was now an obligation to act expeditiously. The Minister's expressed willingness to take strong action should embolden the Board to act in the best interests of conservation. It was vital for the Board and the Department to act in concert and not be seen to be at cross purposes.

Gordon asked what proportion of the harvest from the M'Clintock Channel polar bear population is currently devoted to sport hunting. Stephen replied that there have been about 6 to 12 sport hunts per year out of the total quota of 32 since sport hunting from this population began in 1996. Kevin McCormick asked if the three communities differed in their interest and commitment regarding the use of polar bears for sport hunting rather than for subsistence purposes. Stephen replied that there was diversity of opinion in all of the communities on this matter.

Gordon wondered if there might in fact never have been anything like 900 or even 700 bears in this population. If the original estimate was erroneously high, the current situation would demonstrate one of the pitfalls of trying to maximize estimates of wildlife populations in order to maximize allowable harvests. If that were the case, target numbers of 900 or even 700 might be unrealistically high as the basis for risk analyses for various harvest options as presented. Gordon suggested that other indicators of depletion including age and sex structure of the population were perhaps more compelling than the comparative population estimates, and might warrant more attention. He observed that such parameters could also provide indicators of population recovery. Gordon also suggested that it should be possible to use the current population data in conjunction with the harvest records to "re-construct" the original population. Stephen replied that such a "re-construction" of the base population was in fact being done, and the first estimate is that the initial population was likely around 780 animals. This is in good agreement with the estimate that was actually used to set quotas. It also serves to underline the significance of the population decline as currently estimated, as well as indicating that the tentative population targets that have been identified are realistic.

David Alagalak asked if anything was known about the denning areas used by this polar bear population. Stephen replied that information was sparse, but that the northern part of King William Island was probably a denning area.

David asked about observations regarding the status of neighbouring polar bear populations. Stephen replied that the Lancaster Sound population was assessed in the mid 1990s and was found to be in a very healthy state. The Viscount Melville Sound population was found (in the early 1990s) to be rather badly depleted but is now recovering. Work on the Northern Beaufort Sea population is currently underway.

Gordon requested elaboration of the DSD contention (as per the briefing material) that the M'Clintock Channel polar bear population is genetically distinct from other populations. Stephen replied that this conclusion is based primarily on tag returns and telemetry. Genetic studies by David Paetkau and his collaborators at the University of Alberta actually revealed a low level of differentiation between polar bears from M'Clintock Channel and those of neighbouring management zones (except North Beaufort Sea). However those particular results (published in the Journal of Molecular Ecology for 1999) were considered by the authors to be misleading on account of the small sample size.

David suggested that it would be appropriate for the Board to take time to better assess the results of the Kugluktuk workshop, and that it might be useful for the Department and the Board to consider more fully the information that was available from the recent DSD studies. Kevin counseled quick and decisive action by the Board, but with provision to revisit the matter as more information becomes available. Meeka Mike agreed that action was required, but stressed the need to obtain and take better account of traditional knowledge in order to more precisely define an action plan. Meeka expressed opposition to imposing a moratorium unless there was very clear provision for removing it if further reflection (and especially the input of more traditional knowledge) showed it to be unnecessary. Makabe Nartok reported that an elder at the Kugluktuk workshop advised that there had never been an abundance of polar bears in M'Clintock Channel, and suggested that this was the type of traditional knowledge that needs to be brought out.

Kevin McCormick observed that this is a high-profile issue and that it was important for the NWMB to be seen to be acting in the interests of conservation. Doing otherwise could undermine confidence in the management of other polar bear populations in the NSA, and might even invite scrutiny and criticism about the management of other species.

David noted that the communities had gone a considerable distance in proposing that the annual quota for this population be reduced from 32 to 12 animals. In his view there was much to be gained by having the agreement of the communities with respect to any immediate course of action. David suggested that a quota reduction to fewer than 12 animals in the first year of a new management regime could be counter-productive by virtue of the hardship and resentment that it might cause. A quota of 12 could be a first step toward a more severe reduction (if such were deemed necessary), and could buy time for developing a more considered course of action.

The Board decided (**Resolution 2000- 249**) to approve a harvest of 12 polar bears from the M'Clintock Channel population for 2001, to be followed by a moratorium on hunting from this population in 2002. As part of its decision the Board would charge the DSD to take the necessary steps over the next two years to obtain additional information (particularly from the traditional knowledge perspective), to more fully assess all the available information (from all perspectives), and to develop an effective management plan for subsequent years including the identification of indicators to underpin subsequent quota revisions. As part of its decision the Board would also urge the relevant Nunavut government agencies to take concerted action with respect to the following matters as set out by the participants at the Kugluktuk workshop:

- Collection and input of traditional knowledge regarding this population;
- Development of economic options for the benefit of the affected parties;
- Initiation of studies (via satellite/radio collaring) on polar bear disturbance as a possible stimulus for out-migration from M'Clintock Channel;
- Continuation of studies (via mark and recapture) on polar bear population abundance in M'Clintock Channel;
- Development and deployment of polar bear deterrents;
- Close collaboration with the HTOs in the conduct of research; and
- Incorporation of these provisions in formal Memoranda of Understanding.

#### **4. Office Space Options for the NWMB**

Jim Noble advised that construction of the Igluvut Building by Qikiqtaaluk Corporation is nearing completion and poses a new opportunity that the Board might wish to consider for meeting its office space requirements. In addition to QC, NTI and the Royal Bank have also committed to leasing space in the new building. One block of approximately 3600 square feet remains uncommitted.

The NWMB currently leases 2470 square feet in the Parnaivik Building at a total annual cost of about \$87,000. This space is becoming marginal for the Board's requirements, and provides no possibility for accommodating any expansion. Cost of the new (45% larger) space, which is considered to be of very prime location and quality, would be nearly double the Board's current outlay. The present space is assessed at \$27 per square foot; the new space is quoted at \$36 per square foot. Common areas, at \$10 per square foot, are extra in both cases. The quotation for the new space might be somewhat negotiable, depending on lease duration and other terms. The cost to adapt the space specifically to accommodate NWMB needs would be extra but negotiable.

Kevin McCormick asked if any actual forecasts had been attempted for NWMB office space requirements going forward. Jim replied that this depended on such things as continuation (or not) of the Harvest Study, and on new initiatives (or not) in areas such as conservation education and marine and coastal planning and management. Storage space is at a premium in the present location, and it will soon be necessary to sacrifice the NWMB meeting room for other purposes.

Another option might be to lease new or additional space in the Parnaivik Building that is about to be vacated by other tenants. Or, the Board might want to consider once again developing a building of its own. The 10-year planning exercise that the Board is about to initiate would be very pertinent but perhaps too late. It is also pertinent that the Board's current lease expires in April; however no difficulty would be anticipated in renewing it, including at current rates. Kevin suggested that another possibility would be to call for tenders to meet the NWMB's office space requirements.

David Alagalak considered it important for the Board to avoid becoming constrained in the exercise of its mandate on account of having inadequate office space. Kevin reiterated the benefits of a needs analysis, together with an identification and comparative assessment of available options. The Board authorized the Chairman and the Executive Director to undertake such an analysis, and in particular to enter into discussions with QC officials (the owners of both buildings) to obtain a firmer indication of the relative costs and benefits of the different courses of action available to the Board.

## **5. Salary Advance to NWMB Chairperson**

David Alagalak declared a conflict of interest and departed the Conference Call for the duration of this agenda item.

Jim Noble reminded the Members that the Chairperson needed immediate access to \$3450 cash to facilitate a move from Apex to Co-op Housing in Iqaluit. This move was deemed to be consistent with the interests of the NWMB. The Chairperson is willing to enter into agreement with the NWMB for a cash advance against his salary in this amount, repayable by the end of March.

The Board decided (**Resolution 2000- 250**) to authorize a salary advance to the NWMB Chairperson in the amount of \$3450, to be repaid in full without interest by way of deductions from salary by 31 March 2001.

## **6. KWF Request for Authorization to Expend Approved Funds**

Jim Noble reminded the Members that the Board at the last meeting approved a budgetary item in the amount of \$28,000 for the KWF, to be charged against unexpended funds from 1999/00, this for a pilot project to help the HTOs in the region become more effective in exercising their mandates and meeting their obligations. The present request is to provide authorization to the RWO to expend up to \$20,000 of this approved funding to retain a legal advisor to assist the HTOs and the RWO in re-drafting their bylaws to bring them into conformity with the NLCA and with other recent developments, and at the same time to hire a consultant to seek ways to facilitate re-activation of the HTOs at Baker Lake,

Chesterfield Inlet and Whale Cove. The funding would be used entirely for enabling, and none of it would be transferred directly to any of the HTOs.

The Board decided **(Resolution 2000- 251)** to authorize the preparation of a contribution agreement with the KWF for the provision of up to \$20,000 of NWMB funds to retain legal and other advice to assist the RWO and the Keewatin HTOs to adapt their bylaws to conform to the NLCA, and also to seek ways to help re-activate three of the HTOs that are non-functional at the present time.

## **7. Selection of Contractor to Facilitate 10-Year Planning Exercise**

Jim Noble advised that seven expressions of interest have been received in response to the NWMB advertisement that was placed in the northern papers for a facilitator to lead the Board's planning initiative for the next (10-year) contract period. The detailed Terms of Reference are nearing finalization, and the next step will be to select a contractor from among the eligible candidates.

Meeka Mike reminded the Board of its previous decision to do all that was possible to obtain the services of a firm or individual from the NSA. Jim noted that some of the expressions of interest received to date are from farther afield.

The Board directed that NWMB staff make the selection of an appropriate contractor, with input from Gordon Koshinsky and Meeka Mike as required.

## **8. Adjournment**

Ben thanked all the participants and wished everyone a Merry Christmas. He closed the Conference Call at 3:00 p.m.

**Minutes Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Chairperson** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date**



## **RESOLUTIONS: CONFERENCE CALL 54**

**Resolution 2000- 248:** Resolved that the NWMB approve the agenda for Conference Call No. 54, with the addition of two items:

- KWF request for authorization to expend approved funds; and
- Selection of contractor for 10-year planning exercise.

Moved by: David Alagalak

Seconded by: Gordon Koshinsky

Carried

Date: 19 December 2000

**Resolution 2000- 249:** Resolved that the NWMB approve a harvest of 12 polar bears from the M'Clintock Channel population for 2001, to be followed by a moratorium on hunting from this population in 2002. As part of its decision the Board also charges DSD to take the necessary steps over the next two years to obtain additional information (particularly from the traditional knowledge perspective), to more fully assess all the available information (from all perspectives), and to develop an effective management plan for subsequent years with this plan to include identification of indicators to underpin subsequent quota revisions. Also as part of its decision, the Board urges the relevant Nunavut government agencies to take concerted action with respect to the following matters as set out by the participants at the Kugluktuk workshop:

- Collection and input of traditional knowledge regarding this population;
- Development of economic options for the benefit of the affected parties;
- Initiation of studies on polar bear disturbance as a possible stimulus for out-migration (via satellite/radio collaring);
- Continuation of studies on polar bear population abundance (via mark and recapture);
- Development and deployment of polar bear deterrents;
- Closer collaboration with the HTOs in the conduct of research; and
- Incorporation of these provisions in formal Memoranda of Understanding.

Moved by: David Alagalak

Seconded by: Moses Koonoo

Carried

Date: 19 December 2000

**Resolution 2000- 250:** Resolved that the NWMB approve a salary advance in the amount of \$2250 to the NWMB Chairperson, to be repaid in full via salary deductions prior to the end of March 2001.

Moved by: Meeka Mike

Seconded by: Moses Koonoo

Carried

Date: 19 December 2000

**Resolution 2000- 251:** Resolved that the NWMB approve the provision of \$20,000 to the Keewatin Wildlife Federation for the purpose of assisting the RWO and the Keewatin HTOs to adapt their bylaws to conform to the NLCA, and also to seek ways to help re-activate three of the HTOs that are non-functional at the present time.

Moved by: Makabe Nartok

Seconded by: Meeka Mike

Carried

Date: 19 December 2000