



**SUBMISSION TO THE**

**NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**FOR**

**Information: X**

**Decision:**

**Issue:** Update on Southern Hudson Bay Polar Bear Subpopulation Harvest Risk Assessment and Consultation Plan

**Background:**

- A population survey was completed for the Southern Hudson Bay (SH) subpopulation in 2016 and the final population estimate was released in the final report by the Government of Ontario in March 2018; the final estimate is 780 (590–1029, 95% CI) bears. This is slightly lower than the previous estimate of 943 (658–1350, 95% CI) bears in 2012.
- A primary concern with the subpopulation is the alarming decline in yearlings over the 5-year interval in which the proportion of yearlings declined from 12% of the population in 2011 to just 5% in 2016.
- While the proportion of cubs remained similar (16% in 2011 vs. 19% in 2016), cub survival rate, and ultimately recruitment, has declined.
- Sanikiluaq is the only community in Nunavut that harvests from the SH subpopulation and have a current Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 25 bears.
- In October 2016, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Nunavut Minister of Environment varied a decision for the Total Allowable Take (TAT) of polar bears in the Nunavik Marine Region (NMR) and overlapping area with the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR). The decision was based on the 2011 population estimate and the TAT was varied to 23 bears.
- The federal government does not currently have a legal framework in place to implement the October 2016 ministers' decision in the marine offshore areas regarding the TAT for the NMR and EMR. The GN has provided input to ECCC and Quebec in the drafting of a set of guidelines for the implementation of the TAT until a legal framework is completed by the Federal government.
- There are currently no mechanisms in place in the NMR and EMR regions to actively monitor and enforce any harvest activities and compliance with the TAT.

- In May 2018, following the release of the new population estimate, an Advisory Committee (AC) and a Technical Working Group (TWG) were formed to examine the harvest risk, and to support the decision-making process for a new TAT and TAH for the SH polar bear subpopulation.
- The TWG, which consists of biologists and knowledge-holders from Canada, Nunavut, Quebec, and Ontario, was tasked to prepare a harvest risk assessment and a Status Report for the SH polar bear subpopulation and present the results from the harvest risk analysis to the AC.

### **Current Status:**

- A harvest risk assessment was completed and presented options for a management objective and harvest level, based on the last population survey results, subpopulation demographics, and previous harvest records. The Working Group hired a consultant to complete the analysis which was released in September 2019, along with a subpopulation status report.
- A consultation plan is being developed by the SH Polar Bear AC, with a User-to-User meeting and consultations with affected communities to be carried out before recommendations are submitted to Wildlife Management Boards for decision.
- The Harvest Risk Assessment has recommended a conservative approach to harvest management with the expectation that the subpopulation will likely continue to see declines in abundance over time. The TWG also recommends a commitment to maintain intensive population monitoring through aerial survey (e.g. a population re-assessment in 2021).

### **Consultations:**

- A User-to-User meeting is planned for early in 2020, followed by a community consultation with the Sanikiluaq HTO before TAH recommendations will be submitted to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board.

### **Recommendations:**

- *The Department of Environment recommends a joint Wildlife Management Board hearing to ensure coordinated decision making for this shared polar bear subpopulation.*