

**Consultation with Sanikiluaq Hunters and Trappers Organization on the  
Southern Hudson Bay Polar Bear Survey Results, Status Report, and Harvest  
Risk Assessment**

February 11, 2020



Department of Environment, Government of Nunavut, Iqaluit, Nunavut

## Executive Summary

Government of Nunavut (GN), Department of Environment (DOE) representatives conducted consultations with Sanikiluaq Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) on February 11, 2020.

The intent of this consultation was to ensure the HTO was informed on the results of the 2016 aerial survey to estimate the abundance of Southern Hudson Bay (SH) Polar Bear, the status of the subpopulation, including Traditional Knowledge collected in the relevant jurisdictions, and the results of the Harvest Risk Assessment that was completed using recent and historical survey results, historical harvest records, and population demographics. The results of the Harvest Risk Assessment produced several management options based on a selection of proposed future population trends based on differing environmental scenarios. The management objective options and scenarios were presented to the HTO members. A DOE recommended management action or objective was not given during the consultation, but the DOE representatives highlighted the management objective option and scenario that was recommended by the Technical Working Group that prepared the Status Report and Harvest Risk Assessment Report.

The consultation was also intended to ensure the HTO was well informed on all the most recent information for this subpopulation before sending representatives to an inter-jurisdictional User-to-User meeting in Montreal, Quebec from February 25-26, 2020. The purpose of the User-to-User meeting was to bring the users of the SH polar bear subpopulation together to discuss the desired management objective for this polar bear subpopulation and to determine what the allocation of harvest should be between jurisdictions/user groups.

The HTO expressed that the first scenario presented in Harvest Risk Assessment report, which was based more on Traditional Knowledge, was more likely to represent what the future trends in the environment and the polar bear subpopulation will be. There was consensus that polar bears are able to adapt well to changes in their environment, but a looming question was whether they should consider the idea of a reduced population to have healthier bears.

The feedback collected during this consultation will also aid the GN in future management and of the SH Polar Bear subpopulation.

This report attempts to summarize the comments made by participants during the consultation.

## Preface

This report represents the Department of Environment's best efforts to accurately capture all of the information that was shared during a consultation meeting with the Hunters and Trappers Organization of Sanikiluaq on February 11, 2020.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Environment, or the Government of Nunavut.

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1.0 Report Purpose and Structure .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.0 Purpose of Consultation.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.1 Format of Meetings.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.0 Summary of Consultation .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4.0 Summary.....</b>	<b>7</b>

## 1.0 Report Purpose and Structure

This report is intended to collate and summarize comments, questions, concerns and suggestions provided by the Sanikiluaq HTO in response to the 2016 Southern Hudson Bay (SH) Polar Bear aerial survey results, the subpopulation Status Report and the completed Harvest Risk Assessment Report.

Representatives from the Department of Environment (DOE), the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB), Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), and the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board (QWB) attended the consultation.

## 2.0 Purpose of Consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to work with the Sanikiluaq HTO and ensure that they are well informed of the results of the 2016 aerial survey on the SH Polar Bear subpopulation, the status of the subpopulation (as outlined in the Status Report), and the results of the Harvest Risk Assessment completed by the Technical Working Group. In addition, the meeting also served the purpose to provide an opportunity for the HTO members to ask questions and to obtain clarifications on the reports and results. The results of the Harvest Risk Assessment produced several management options based on a selection of proposed future population trend scenarios under various environmental scenarios. The management objective options and scenarios were presented to the HTO board members. A DOE recommended management action or new harvest limitations were not given during the consultation, but the DOE representatives highlighted which management objective option and scenario was recommended by the Technical Working Group that prepared the Status Report and Harvest Risk Assessment Report.

The consultation was also intended to ensure the HTO was well informed on all the most recent information for this subpopulation before sending representatives to a User-to-User meeting in Montreal, Quebec from February 25-26, 2020. It was important that the Users work together to establish Management Objectives and how they want to manage this subpopulation in the future.

### 2.1 Format of Meetings

The meeting was held in the evening and ran for approximately 3 hours. The meeting was facilitated and led by the DOE Polar Bear Biologists, Markus Dyck and Jasmine Ware, and the DOE Senior Wildlife Advisor, Caryn Smith. The presentation started with opening remarks from Caryn Smith on the purpose of the consultation and the intent to ensure the HTO was prepared to send representatives to the User-to-User meeting in Montreal. This was followed by a presentation on the status of the SH polar bear subpopulation, given by Markus Dyck, and a presentation on the Harvest Risk Assessment, given by Jasmine Ware. The participants were invited to ask questions, raise concerns, or provide advice during the presentation but were

advised there would be breaks for questions. After the presentations, questions/discussion continued until no further questions were raised. DOE asked the HTO to internally discuss the management options and future scenarios and to share this information with their local harvesters for further input.

### **3.0 Summary of Consultation**

The objectives of the consultation were made clear to the HTO members prior to and at the start of the meeting.

**Date:** February 11, 2020

**Representatives:**

- GN-DOE, Polar Bear Biologist II, Markus Dyck
- GN-DOE, Polar Bear Biologist I, Jasmine Ware
- GN-DOE, Senior Wildlife Advisor, Caryn Smith
- GN-DOE, Senior Manager of Operations, Jason Aliqatuqtuq
- GN-DOE, Conservation Officer II, Daniel Qavvik
- NTI, Director of Wildlife, Paul Irngaut
- NWMB, Wildlife Management Biologist, Kyle Ritchie
- QWB, Chairman, James Qillaq
- Translator, Dinah Kavik
- Sanikiluaq HTO Board members
  - Eli Kavik, Chairman
  - Lucassie Arragtainaq, Manager
  - Puasi Ippak, Board Member
  - Joe Arrangutainaq, Board Member
  - Alec Ippak, Board Member
  - Johnny Oqaituk, Board Member

**Comments and questions:**

- The long history of high compliance harvest reporting and harvest management by the community of Sanikiluaq was commended and the high quality of harvest samples sent to the DOE polar bear lab was emphasized.
- The HTO members pointed out their disappointment in the lack of a system for regular harvest reporting in Quebec and they feel that the reported average harvest is much higher than 12.8 bears.
- There were concerns that the underestimated harvest in Quebec makes the harvest in Nunavut look more unsustainable, even though it is based on a near 100% reporting rate, and there will be pressure on Sanikiluaq to reduce their harvest.
- One of the elders on the board pointed out that this year's harvest season, and the ice conditions have not been as safe as compared to previous years and that some areas of

water have not frozen over completely because of snow cover. These changing ice conditions are a concern for the future harvest of polar bears in their area.

- The HTO manger expressed concern over how the HTO would decide which scenario, as presented in the Harvest Risk Assessment report, would be the appropriate one. The DOE representatives elaborated on the information that was used to develop the environmental scenarios, including varying emphasis on the Traditional Knowledge and the Science based on historical trends. It was up to the HTO and community members to assess what scenario they felt would best reflect the future environmental trends, as they were more familiar with their environment and how well bears would be able to adapt to environmental changes.
- The HTO manager pointed out that Inuit and polar bears are able to adapt well to changes and that Scenarios 1 and 2 would be the best to focus on. There were concerns regarding the impact of polar bears on the environment if there were too many for the habitat to support (e.g. the destruction of egg colonies), and there were also concerns about the impacts of environmental changes on the animals that are part of the polar bear diet. No one wants to see starving bears and would much rather see the habitat supporting healthy bears. They also want to ensure a higher population wouldn't negatively impact bird colonies. The NTI representative, Paul Irngaut, stated that NTI would support the HTO on whatever scenario they decided was most appropriate.
- The HTO members felt there was a need to consult with their local hunters before they could make any decisions on the environmental scenario and management option they chose to support.
- An elder from the HTO expressed that the future trends that their forefathers had predicted, before there were survey reports, seemed to be coming true and his generation was now able to have reports and meetings to discuss these changes.
- The HTO manager pointed out that local hunters were beginning to feel that hunting polar bears might not be worth it going forward because of low prices for the hides. If meat becomes the only thing driving the polar bear hunt, the harvesters will likely turn to hunting other species. Even though it is becoming financially difficult to continue hunting polar bears, there is a desire to ensure that the traditions and skills involved with hunting bears is carried forward into the next generations. This translates to a desire to ensure the existing polar bear subpopulation is conserved at a level to allow future harvesting.
- The DOE Senior Manager of Operations, Jason Aliqatuqtuq, pointed out that many Inuit want the traditions and skills involved in hunting polar bears to carry on in future generations so it is important that the Users of the subpopulation determine whether or not they want the population to grow (maximum sustainable yield), stay the same (maintain a stable population), or to lower (a managed decrease).
- It was discussed that under Scenario 1 from the Harvest Risk Assessment, the sustainable harvest options (harvest numbers that would achieve a maximum sustainable yield) would not necessarily result in a reduced TAH recommendation for the subpopulation. The current harvest is approximately 50-55 for the subpopulation

and a possible overall TAH for the subpopulation assuming Scenario 1 would be 63 bears at a 2:1 harvest sex ratio (42 bears at a 1:1 harvest sex ratio).

- There was discussion on the desire to try to maintain a reasonable harvest limit even though there is a current drop in the interest to hunt; there may be increased interest to hunt in the future, especially if the price of polar bear hides improves.
- The HTO would like to see a harvest that everyone is comfortable with but would not limit opportunities down the road.

#### 4.0 Summary

The HTO Chairman expressed that the DOE had provided them with a clear presentation, and they felt more prepared, with better information, to meet with their hunters and come up with a position before attending the User-to-User meeting in Montreal. The biggest concerns for the hunters in their community was the low price for polar bear pelts, which has made polar bear hunting financially difficult for people and now there may need to be a shift to hunting other species. The reduced interest in harvesting polar bears conflicts with the community's desire to maintain traditional harvesting practices and skills for future generations and the insurance that their families will be able to continue to consume traditional country foods. The HTO members felt that the first scenario presented by Harvest Risk Assessment, which was based more on Traditional Knowledge, was more likely to represent what the future trends in the environment and the polar bear subpopulation will be. There was consensus that polar bears are able to adapt well to changes in their environment, but a looming question was whether they should consider the idea of a reduced population to have healthier bears. The habitat may not be able to support higher numbers as environmental changes occur. The HTO members were reminded that they could contact the DOE representatives if they needed any further clarity on any of the information presented, before they attended the User-to-User meeting in Montreal.