



**SUBMISSION TO THE**

**NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**FOR**

**Information:**

**Decision: X**

**Issue:** Polar Bear Harvest Administration and Credit Calculation System (HACCS)

**Background:**

- The Department of Environment (DOE) participated in the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) public hearing for the Nunavut Polar Bear Co-Management Plan in Iqaluit from November 13-16, 2018.
- The specific components of polar bear management that were criticized the most were the current practice, for all but one subpopulation, of a 2:1 harvest sex ratio (two males harvested for every female), and the flexible quota system, which were perceived to be over complicated and overly punitive in response to overharvest situations.
- DOE recommended that for all polar bear subpopulations in Nunavut, a harvest sex ratio of up to 50% females should be adopted and communities could use up to 50% of their base allocation from the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) to harvest female bears. Along with this recommendation came a need for an updated administration framework to allow implementation of the Up to 1:1 (sex ratio) harvest.
- The NWMB decided to approve the recommended harvest sex ratio of up to 50% female bears and the Minister of Environment accepted that decision in August 2019.
- DOE drafted an initial administration system which the NWMB approved on an interim basis September 2019 and requested that the DOE consult with co-management partners to obtain feedback and re-submit to the Board once feedback was incorporated into the document.
- In the fall of 2019, the DOE provided a letter and an information package to all Regional Wildlife Organizations (RWOs) and Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTO) and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) regarding the new harvest administration document with an overview of the major changes to the system. The DOE requested that co-management partners review the package with their technical advisors and provide any comments, questions, or other feedback to the DOE to help improve the new harvest administration document.

- Feedback was incorporated from both internal and external input and the resulting document was named the Harvest Administration and Credit Calculation System, or HACCS, to avoid confusion with previous harvest administration system in effect under a 2:1 male to female harvest management system.
- The HACCS document was submitted to the NWMB for the June 2020 regular meeting and the Board again requested that the DOE conduct further consultation with co-management partners before re-submitting as well as directing co-management partners (RWOs, HTOs, etc.) to engage with the DOE in this process.

### **Current Status:**

- Another consultation package was distributed to co-management partners in December 2020 with request for feedback on the HACCS by March 19, 2021.
- The QWB indicated via letter in March 2021 that they would be unable to provide substantive feedback to the HACCS due to insufficient time, understanding, or capacity to deliver education to membership regarding the changes made between the 2005 MOUs and the HACCS.
- DOE invited all co-management partners to 2 (two) consultations hosted virtually in April and July 2021.
- DOE revised the HACCS from feedback and comments originating from these consultations.
- In August 2021, the DOE sent an additional request to all co-management partners seeking additional feedback and input on the HACCS and provided a deadline of October 1, 2021, to allow time for DOE staff to review the feedback and update the document.
- The three RWOs provided an alternative polar bear harvest administration proposal on October 1, 2021, requesting feedback from the DOE by October 22, 2021.
- The DOE submitted a letter to the three RWOs indicating the inability to respond to their proposal in 21 calendar days because the alternative proposal included major changes to polar bear harvest management, including some which would require changes to the current Polar Bear Co-Management Plan.
- Although the DOE was not able to provide a detailed response to the RWO proposed harvest administration system in the time requested, they did view it as substantive feedback and comment which could improve the HACCS. Thus, the DOE reviewed the RWO proposal before the NWMB submission deadline and incorporated points from it for improvement of the HACCS and accommodation of comments, where possible (see Appendix A for details).
- Through the entire development process of the HACCS, the DOE has repeatedly revised the document in response to feedback and comments from co-management partners.

- Communities and RWOs have relayed that there is demand to remove defence of life and property kills from the quota. The HACCS is not able to accommodate this request as it contravenes the Polar Bear Co-Management Plan and could negatively impact sustainable harvest and management.

### **Consultations:**

- See **Appendix A** for detailed information on details of the development and consultation of the HACCS.
- In October 2019, the DOE provided a letter, the interim harvest administration document, and a summarized, plain language document on the changes to the administration of the Harvest and Credit Calculation system to all the RWOs, HTOs, and NTI. The DOE requested that the co-management partners have their technical staff review the documents and provide any comments and feedback to the DOE by January 2020. Based on internal and external feedback, the DOE made relevant changes to the document before submitting to the June 2020 NWMB regular meeting.
- In December 2020, a second letter and information package was shared with RWOs, HTOs, and NTI. This package included information outlining the changes that had been made in the HACCS that had been submitted to the NWMB in June 2020. Co-management partners were again asked to provide comments, questions, or any other feedback that could improve the HACCS going forward.
  - A follow-up letter was sent in February 2021 to remind co-management partners of the request for comment
- A virtual meeting to review the HACCS was held on April 1, 2021, and all co-management partners were invited to attend. There were many questions on the HACCS from attending co-management partners and substantive recommendations for improvements. It was evident during the meeting that a second meeting was warranted to allow further input and discussion.
- A second virtual meeting was scheduled to take place on April 26, 2021 but had to be postponed due to the tragic loss of the DOE lead Polar Bear Biologist, Markus Dyck, on April 25, 2021.
- The second virtual meeting was re-scheduled for July 27, 2021, which gave DOE staff time to review the comments made during the initial meeting and update the HACCS to reflect necessary changes to address some of the inconsistencies and weaknesses of the existing document. Examples of how the system could be applied were added to improve clarity in the document as well.
- Based on feedback during the July 27 meeting, the DOE agreed to defer the submission of the HACCS to the NWMB until the December 2021 regular meeting.
- In August 2021, the DOE sent an additional request to all co-management partners seeking additional feedback and input on the HACCS and provided a deadline of October 1, 2021.

- In October 2021, DOE staff received an alternative draft harvest administration document from the three RWOs. The DOE viewed this as substantive feedback to the HACCS and reviewed the RWO proposal before the NWMB submission deadline. From that review, the DOE was able to incorporate points from it for improvement of the HACCS and accommodation of comments, where possible (see Appendix A for details).

**Recommendations:**

1. DOE recommends that the NWMB approve the revised Administration and Credit Calculation system so it can be implemented effectively for the 2020/2021 harvest season.

## APPENDIX A

### DEVELOPMENT AND CONSULTATION OF THE POLAR BEAR HARVEST ADMINISTRATION AND CREDIT CALCULATION SYSTEM (HACCS)

#### 2019:

- Following the Minister's acceptance of the NWMB's decision to change the Nunavut polar bear harvest sex selectivity to an Up to 1:1 male to female ratio in 2019, an updated administration framework for the new harvest management system was required.
- To allow implementation of the Up to 1:1 harvest, the DOE drafted a document detailing the harvest administration and submitted it for decision for the March 2019 regular NWMB meeting.
- The Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board (QWB) submitted feedback and questions to the NWMB and DOE on March 1, 2019, via email (attached document dated February 18, 2019).
- The DOE updated the document to include the QWB-suggested revisions for clarity.
- The NWMB made a decision in August 2019 to accept, on an interim basis, the Interim Flexible Quota System submitted by the DOE. This decision was accepted by the Minister in October 2019, retroactively effective starting July 1 with the 2019/2020 polar bear harvest season.
- The NWMB instructed the DOE to obtain feedback and comment on the harvest administration system document.
- The DOE solicited review and comment from technical staff and co-management partners in October 2019 through January 2020.
- No written review or comments were received.
- Through external and internal oral feedback, it became clear there was confusion around the cub harvesting protocol and the exchange and request process for credits, which prompted the DOE to add clarity in the cub harvesting clause and to create visual figures outlining the credit exchange and request processes.

#### 2020:

- No further feedback was received by the DOE between January 2020 and June 2020.
- The DOE submitted the revised harvest administration document and to the June 2020 NWMB regular meeting for decision.
- The document was named the Harvest Administration and Credit Calculation System, or HACCS, to avoid confusion with previous harvest administration system in effect under a 2:1 male to female harvest management system.

- In July 2020, the NWMB directed the DOE to engage in further consultations and directed the co-management partners (Inuit Organizations, Regional Wildlife Organizations, and Hunters and Trappers Organizations via their RWO) to engage with the DOE on the HACCS document.
- Another consultation package was distributed to co-management partners in December 2020 with request for feedback on the HACCS by March 19, 2021.

**2021:**

- The QWB indicated via letter in March 2021 that they would be unable to provide substantive feedback to the HACCS due to insufficient time, understanding, or capacity to deliver education to membership regarding the changes made between the 2005 MOUs and the HACCS. The QWB requested the DOE to outline changes and provide examples.
- A virtual consultation with all co-management partners was held in April 2021.
- The major concerns raised during the April consultation were:
  - Defence of life and property harvests coming from a community annual recommended quota
  - Concern that overharvest of female bears prevented credit accumulation of male bears.
- The DOE must account for all human-caused mortality from the quota and could not accommodate that change to the HACCS. This is part of the previous MOUs and current Polar Bear Co-Management Plan.
- Fully discounting defence kills with no accounting measure directly interferes with the principles of sustainable harvest (NA sections 5.1.2(g), 5.1.5(c)).
- Defence kills have represented, on average, 7.9% of total harvests from 1981-2021 and range annually from 3.5 – 19% of the total harvest.
- Another virtual consultation occurred in July 2021 on the updated HACCS with all co-management partners.
- The major concerns during the July consultation were:
  - RWO discontent with current HACCS version in general.
  - Too much DOE involvement in credit distribution.
  - RWO wanted to use female credits to increase male allocation.
  - Desire for specific tag system for family group defence harvests.
  - The RWO, QWB, requested delay of submission to December 2021 NWMB meeting.
- The DOE agreed to defer submission to December 2021 and further revised the HACCS to incorporate feedback from the July consultation.
- Following the July consultations, the DOE requested further feedback from co-management partners by October 1, 2021.
- The three RWOs provided an alternative polar bear harvest administration proposal on October 1, requesting feedback by October 22, 2021, by the DOE.

- The proposal includes major changes to the current, legal framework of polar bear harvest management in Nunavut including:
  - Not accounting for defence of life and property kills
  - Carrying credits forward wholly, or partly, in perpetuity
- The RWO proposal is also based on as-yet ratified RWO bylaws.
- The DOE is planning on a December submission to the NWMB regular meeting for the updated HACCS.
- The DOE submitted a letter to the three RWOs indicating the inability to respond to their proposal in 21 calendar days because it would require changing the current Polar Bear Co-Management Plan.
- The HACCS has been under consultation and in revision for two years.
- The DOE has updated the HACCS in direct response to oral and consultation feedback. These changes include, but are not limited to:
  - Changes to allow for male credit accumulation even in the event of female overharvest.
  - Revised wording to explicitly indicate the RWO-held responsibility for deciding credit requests and exchanges.
  - Changed wording clarifying allocation of floating tags and their sex ratio by the RWO
  - Removed clause for automatic dispersal of credits in response to RWO feedback
  - Added clarity on cub harvest protocols in response to community feedback
  - Added calculation examples for credit accumulation and quota adjustments
  - Included figures for credit request and exchange processes to increase transparency and standardization.
  - Updated figure captions to explicitly indicate the RWO-held responsibility for deciding credit requests and exchanges.
  - Simplified figures based on consultation feedback
  - Overall revisions to wording and structure to reduce complexity in response to 2018 NWMB public hearing for the Polar Bear Co-Management Plan (e.g., math symbols, probability terminology were removed).
- Although the DOE was not able to provide a detailed response to the RWO proposed harvest administration in the time requested, they did view it as substantive feedback and comment. Thus, the DOE reviewed the RWO proposal before the NWMB submission deadline and incorporated points from it for improvement of the HACCS and accommodation of comments, including:
  - Specifically noting that the HACCS is a living co-management document that can be reviewed or amended
  - Adding in a clause based on past 2005 MOUs whereby harvests within 30 km of a subpopulation boundary can be assigned to either of the adjacent subpopulation areas per the HTOs request and the RWOs subsequent decision.

- Adding in a clause whereby the DOE automatically alternates odd-numbered base allocations annually under the implicit approval of the RWO, unless otherwise directed by the relevant RWO.
- Adding in a clause whereby survival kills are explicitly addressed in terms of their definition and accounting.