

# **HTO Consultations on muskox distribution and abundance, Muskox Management Units MX-11**

December 2022 and January 2023



Department of Environment, Government of Nunavut, Iqaluit, Nunavut

## Executive Summary

Representatives of the Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment (ENV) conducted a consultation with the Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) of Ekaluktutiak HTO (EHTO), Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association HTO (KAA), and Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB) on December 19, 2022, and with the Omingmaktok HTO on December 21, 2022. The primary purpose of these consultations was to inform the community members of the results of the 2022 abundance estimate of MX-11 and discuss management recommendations that the affected HTOs would like to see implemented. The consultation was also a way to receive and collect additional local and traditional knowledge insight to complement the survey report.

This report attempts to summarize the comments made by HTO board members during the consultation on December 19 and 21, 2022, the proposed HTOs recommendations, and the accommodation from ENV.

## Preface

This report represents the Department of Environment's best efforts to accurately capture all the information that was shared during consultation meetings with the Hunters and Trappers Organizations.

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

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## 1.0 Report Purpose and Structure

This report is intended to collate and summarize comments, questions, concerns, and suggestions raised during a consultation held with the Ekaluktutiak HTO (EHTO), Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association HTO (KAA), Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB) on December 19, 2022 and with the Omingmaktok HTO on December 21, 2022 about the results of the muskox distribution and abundance survey of the muskox management unit MX-11 and management recommendations. The summary and notes herein only reflect what was shared during the meeting.

## 2.0 Purpose of Consultations

The primary purpose of the meetings, organized and led by Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment (ENV), was to engage the HTOs in an ongoing dialogue on the survey results of the muskox management unit MX-11 and solicit feedback on the report, gather additional local knowledge, and discuss future management recommendations. The results from the 2022 population survey were communicated during the meeting. The affected HTOs were consulted as the designated representatives as per the *Nunavut Agreement* (NA).

### 2.1 Format of Meetings

The meeting was held during the afternoon and was about two hours in length. Meetings were facilitated and led by the Regional Biologist (Lisa-Marie Leclerc), who was the primary presenter. The Acting Wildlife Manager (Mitch Campbell) and Kugluktuk Conservation Officer (Russell Akeeagok) were present as observers. The presentation format was informal and was in-person with the KAA and online via Microsoft Teams with the EHTO and KRWB. The HTO board members were invited to ask questions or raise concerns and recommendations.

## 3.0 HTO Consultation Summary

The objectives of the meeting were made clear to the HTO. However, since we are planning to submit harvest recommendations to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board for their March 2023 Regular Meeting, in the interest of reporting the survey results as soon as possible, no report available in advance of the December 19 meeting. However, following the meeting, the summary report and the PowerPoint presentation were made available to the HTOs to help discuss recommendations with the HTO Board members in the hopes of providing more meaningful engagement. Muskoxen are important economically and an alternative source of country food when caribou meat becomes scarce. Several HTO members stated the importance of sustaining the muskox to a certain number to assure the continuation of their harvest rights and food security.

### 3.1.1 HTO Consultation Summary-2022

**Issues:** Muskox distribution and abundance, Muskox Management Unit: Central Kitikmeot Group MX-11; The muskox population estimate for this management unit is higher than recorded in previous surveys which suggests an increase in Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) from where it currently stands.

**Purpose of the Consultations:**

A consultation was organized in Kugluktuk on Ekaluktutiak HTO (EHTO), Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association HTO (KAA), Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB) on December 19, 2022.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to engage the HTO in an ongoing dialogue on the muskox survey, review the report, and talk about future management recommendations. The meeting was an opportunity to inform the audience that ENV is supportive of increasing the current TAH to 300 based on previously used harvest proportions applied to previous survey estimates.

**Date:** December 19, 2022

**Representatives:**

ENV: Lisa-Marie Leclerc, Russell Akeeagok, Mitch Campbell, Richard Akana

KAA: Kevin Klengenber, Myles Peterson, Randy Hinanik, Kevin Ongahak, Nigel Allukpik, Billy Mcwilliam, Larry Adjun (Chair), Allen Nip, Amanda Dumond (Manager).

ETHO: Peter Evalik, Bobby Greenley (Chair) Beverly Maksagak (Manager)

KRWB: Peggy Adjun

**Summary of the Discussion:**

During the presentation, HTO members made comments and asked questions to ensure they understood the research methodology and results. Since the HTOs were involved during all phases of this project, issues and concerns around design and field methods were already well understood by many of the meeting attendees. However, a concern regarding the exclusion of small islands off the coast north and east of the survey area were raised. Some muskoxen have been seen on these islands that are part of the muskox management unit. We were able to survey most islands at the head of Bathurst Inlet as well as Melbourne Island, but weather and poor visibility conditions prohibited us from surveying most of the islands north of the mainland and west of the inlet. Since the overall area of these islands was small, having included these in the final analysis would likely not significantly change the final estimate. Additional questions spoke to the exclusion of the southeastern most stratum 9 and possible impacts to the MX-11 estimate. Although the entire Stratum 9 was not flown, we are confident that this again is likely not a major concern due to the expected very low densities expected to have been there and the extremely small amount of harvest within that portion of the MX-11 Management zone.

It was clarified that the last 2013 survey, only 1/3 of the management unit was flown resulting in an estimate of 6,746 muskoxen; with the remaining extents likely having a low abundance of approximately 750 muskoxen (based on historic observations). If these approximations are correct, a population estimate of 7,500 muskoxen would likely have occupied those extents during this survey period. From this estimate, the current Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 225 was established. The 2022 survey

produced a new abundance estimate for MX-11 of 10,246 muskoxen; this result indicates that since the last population estimate the population has grown and is doing well under the current TAH which would suggest considerable room to increase harvest within the Management zone. During the consultation ENV recommended an increase in TAH from 225 to 300 using a harvesting rate of about 3%. It was pointed out that the current quota is not filled, and the current harvesting pressure has been well below 3% on this population.

Discussions took part among the users as to how the proposed TAH of 300 can be shared between HTOs; recommended potential allocations were made of 120 for Kugluktuk, 120 for Cambridge Bay, and 60 for Bay Chimo and Bathurst Inlet. It was also recommended by some members to allocate proposed increase based on muskox densities, which varies across the management unit.

A member raised concerns about the health and the high density of muskox east of Kugluktuk (Stratum 1). With increased muskox densities, there is a higher likelihood of disease outbreaks. Thus, a proposal was made to increase the harvest rate from 3% to 3.3% corresponding to increasing the TAH from 300 to 350 animals. The rationale behind this was that increasing the TAH above the GN recommendation would have a positive effect of controlling density dependent disease and utilize the additional TAH that provided for growth during the years leading up to the 2022 survey. This would also have the potential of stabilizing growth while offering more harvesting opportunities in a sustainable fashion.

The HTOs requested additional time to have a separate discussion with their board members and their users to forge their recommendations and share it with ENV for consideration. As a way forward, we decided that the HTOs and KRWB will be informing the GN of their recommendations on or around January 17 2023, dependent upon when the boards will hold their first meeting in the new year.

Informing their regrets, a separate phone conversation with Omingmaktok occurred on December 21, 2022. We took the opportunity to share the main findings of the muskox survey, the results, and the current recommendations. Questions were asked about where the high-density areas are located and highlighted during the conversation.

#### **Recommendation to the GN:**

No feedback from the HTOs or RWO was received as of the writing of this report.

## **4.0 Conclusion- Next Steps**

The ENV will finalize the muskox report with the additional comments provided during the meeting and distribute it to the co-management partners. When planning the 2022 muskox survey on the mainland, ENV will consider the comments and suggestions made during the HTO consultation and the formal recommendation provided by the RWO and HTOs.

Based on the information received the ENV will make a submission for new harvest management actions to NWMB.



## **Appendix I**

### **PowerPoint Presentation:**