

Consultation on the 2024-2025 Aerial Abundance Estimates of Barren Ground Caribou of Baffin Island and Management Recommendations

February 2026

Format of Consultation

The consultation was held in person at the Aqsarniit Ballroom in Iqaluit on February 6, 2026. The meeting ran from approximately 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with a break for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. It opened with a prayer, followed by welcoming remarks from Minister Brian Koonoo. Neil Kigutaq (Director of Operations) chaired the meeting. Krista Shofstall (Baffin Regional Biologist) presented the report and results. The presentation was informal and the HTA members were invited to ask question or comment throughout. Recommendations were presented and discussed.

Attendees

	Given Name	Surname	Position
Meeting Chair	Neil	Kigutaq	Director Wildlife Operations
Survey Lead	Mitch	Campbell	Kivalliq Regional Biologist
Presenter	Krista	Shofstall	Baffin Regional Biologist
Recorder	Jonathan	Pitseolak	Wildlife Technician
Government of Nunavut	Drikus	Gissing	Director of Wildlife Research MLA of Tununig, Minister of Environment and Minister of Cultural and Heritage
Government of Nunavut	Brian	Koonoo	Ministerial Political Advisor
Government of Nunavut	Tracy	Wood	Assistant Deputy Minister, Environment
Government of Nunavut	Naomie	Pudluk	Executive Director
Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board	Kolola	Pitsiulak	Executive Director
Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board	David	Qamaniq	
Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board	Mike	Ferguson	Director of Wildlife & Environment
Government of Nunavut	Jeff	McDonald	Wildlife Manager South Baffin Operations
Government of Nunavut	Simon	Gagne	Conservation Officer
Nunavut Inuit Wildlife Secretariat	Jason	Mikki	Executive Director
Iqaluit	David	Alexander	Local Harvester

Arctic Bay	Suujuq		Elder
Arctic Bay	Sakiasie	Qaunaq	HTO Representative
Arctic Bay	Mathew	Akikuluk	HTO Representative
Arctic Bay	Don	Taqtu	HTO Representative
Clyde River	Roger	Etuangat	HTO Representative
Clyde River	Steven	Aippellee	HTO Representative
Clyde River	Jaysie	Tigullaraq	HTO Representative
Igloolik	Lloyd	Idlout	HTO Representative
Igloolik	Natalino	Piugattuk	HTO Representative
Igloolik	Seemee	Qamaniq	HTO Representative
Kimmirut	Mathewsie	Mingeriak	HTO Representative
Kimmirut	Jawlie	Akavak	HTO Representative
Kinngait	Eejeesiak	Eejeetsiak	HTO Representative
Kinngait	Adamie	Aliqu	HTO Representative
Kinngait	Taqialuk	Nuna	HTO Representative
Pangnirtung	Manasie	Maniapik	HTO Representative
Pangnirtung	Jaco	Ishulutaq	HTO Representative
Pangnirtung	Limee	Nakashuk	HTO Representative
Pond Inlet	Jonah	Koonark	HTO Representative
	Jaloo	Kooneeliusie	HTO Representative
Qikiqtarjuaq	Jordan	Audlakiak	HTO Representative
Qikiqtarjuaq	Geela	Qiyuqtaq	HTO Representative

Regrets:

Charlie Inuarak (Pond Inlet), David Pitseolak (Pond Inlet) and Jawlie Mingeriak (Kimmirut) were unable to attend.

Summary of the Discussion:

Department of Environment (ENV) consultation aimed to keep Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs) and the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board (QWB) actively involved in discussions regarding Baffin Island caribou monitoring, recent abundance estimates, and proposed management recommendations. The meeting began with procedural matters, including agreement to record the meeting audio. After a round of introductions Krista Shofstall presented the background and results of the 2024–2025 Baffin Island caribou surveys. She reviewed the history of concerns about declining caribou numbers in the early 2000s, the 2012 survey, and the 2014 island-wide survey that estimated approximately 4,600 caribou. This led to an 8-month moratorium and then the establishment of a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH), initially set at 250 male-only caribou (approximately 5% of the

2014 estimated population), with later adjustments to include females and gradual annual increases.

Results from the 2024–2025 Baffin Island population surveys were presented, including updated abundance estimates of approximately 48,681 caribou, indicating a strong recovery since the 2014 survey. The Government of Nunavut (GN)'s starting point for discussion, based on the Baffin Island survey and previously collected data through composition surveys as well as a literature review, was a 5% TAH, with 20% female allocation and annual increase 100 Caribou. These recommendations were reviewed alongside alternative options raised during discussion and were being considered in preparation for submission to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB).

The meetings provided an opportunity for HTO representatives, Elders, QWB representatives, and attendees to ask questions, express concerns, and formally identify recommendations related to harvest levels, female harvest allocation, annual increases, monitoring frequency, collaring programs, industrial impacts, tag distribution, and the integration of Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) into management decisions.

Discussion from HTO representatives, Elders, and QWB representatives focused heavily on increasing the harvest rate beyond the GN's initial recommendation of 5% of the updated estimate (2,434 Caribou). Participants identified that:

- Caribou numbers are visibly increasing across Baffin.
- Past harvest levels (1980s–1990s) were much higher.
- Current quotas are too restrictive and create frustration, unreported harvest, and food insecurity.
- Increasing harvest could prevent natural die-offs when populations grow too large.
- Community populations have increased and need more access to country food.

Several HTO representatives proposed raising the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) to 10% or 15%, with some proposing 20%. Though after the number of caribou were added to the percentages a majority of HTO representatives agreed on 15% (7,302 Caribou) as a starting point. There was also discussion of increasing the female harvest allocation from 20% to 40% of the total harvest.

Concerns raised during the discussion included:

- Sustainability and uncertainty in population estimates. Consideration must be given to the sustainability of the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) in relation to uncertainty in population estimates. Because aerial survey estimates include a margin of error, the

true population size may be higher or lower than the reported estimate.

Understanding this uncertainty is important when determining a sustainable harvest level to ensure that management decisions remain precautionary and support the long-term conservation of the herd.

- The risk of increasing harvest levels too quickly on harvest sustainability.
- Limited conservation officer capacity to manage very high TAH levels.
- The need for continued monitoring and community reporting.
- Impacts from mining and industrial development, with some calling for a pause until caribou populations grow further.
- Opposition to carry-over of unused tags (though many HTO representatives supported a one-year trial).

An Elder emphasized Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ), stating that caribou populations naturally fluctuate and migrate, and expressing concern about overreliance on government science. A couple of HTO representatives advocated reducing or eliminating tags entirely, while the majority of HTO representatives supported keeping a TAH system in place but adjusting the TAH over time and having restrictions on the timing of female harvest (e.g., avoiding harvest of cows with calves in late summer).

After further discussion and compromise, a draft motion was developed by QWB and the GN proposing:

- 6,000 total tags annually (just over 12% of the estimated population).
- 40% female allocation.
- An annual increase of 125 animals.
- Annual meetings between GN, QWB, and HTOs to review status.
- Continued monitoring and consultation.
- No recommendation for carry-over of unused tags (though further discussion may occur).

Many HTO representatives still preferred a 15% harvest (7,302 Caribou) and/or a higher harvest with an annual increase (up to 250). However, all HTO representatives agreed to try the draft motion as a starting point, with the understanding that it can be revisited in future years.

Furthermore, the Government of Nunavut (GN) and representatives from the consultation recommend the following actions to ensure sustainable management and long-term monitoring of Baffin Island caribou:

- **Annual Consultation Meetings:** Hold yearly meetings with HTOs and the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board to discuss, document, and update caribou population status, management actions, and emerging concerns.
- **Spring Composition Studies:** Conduct population composition surveys every two years to monitor herd productivity, abundance, and population trends.
- **Telemetry Program:** Maintain a coordinated telemetry program across North, Central, and South Baffin ranges to:
 1. Identify and understand critical seasonal ranges.
 2. Assess and mitigate potential impacts from industrial development.
 3. Improve caribou range mapping to support land-use planning.
 4. Monitor migratory corridors and prevent disruption from infrastructure.
 5. Track mortality rates and adult female survival to evaluate herd health.
 6. Locate caribou efficiently to support cost-effective surveys and ecological research.
- **Future Re-assessment:** After 5–7 years, conduct abundance or reconnaissance aerial surveys to re-evaluate the TAH and NQL based on updated population data.

Ongoing monitoring is essential for the effective management and long-term conservation of Baffin Island caribou. Regular surveys, telemetry programs, and continued engagement with co-management partners provide critical information on population trends, herd productivity, seasonal ranges, and potential threats. This information supports informed decision-making and helps ensure that management actions and recommendations to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board are based on the best available knowledge.