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Pangnirtung Hunters & Trappers Organization

SUBMISSION TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD (NWMB)

Regular Meeting No. RM 002-2026

FOR

Information: ☐ Decision: ☒

Issue: *Modification of Cumberland Sound Beluga Quotas / Basic Needs Levels to be Implemented in July 2026*

Background:

The Pangnirtung Hunters and Trappers Association (PHTA) recommends that the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) and Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) approve and implement changes to the applicable Marine Mammal Regulations by July 2026 to manage the harvesting of beluga whales in Cumberland Sound as enabled by the following and other sections of the Nunavut Agreement, in that:

5.1.1 defines "basic needs level" as the level of harvesting by Inuit identified in Sections 5.6.19 to 5.6.25

5.1.2(e) explicitly recognizes “Inuit systems of wildlife management”, while other potential management systems (e.g., scientific systems} are not mentioned in Article 5.

5.3.3 states that the NWMB or a Minister shall limit Inuit harvesting only to the extent necessary (a) to effect a valid conservation purpose…

5.7.3 gives powers and functions to HTOs (e.g., the Pangnirtung HTA) to manage their community basic needs level and general aspects of harvesting of wildlife by its community members, including the allocation of community basic needs levels and non-quota limitations among its members.

5.7.8. enables each HTO to develop and adopt by-laws guiding its operations.

Other sections of the Nunavut Agreement and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples may also affect the roles of the Inuit and the Pangnirtung HTA to manage beluga harvesting by its members but will not be repeated here to save space.

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In June 2000, the NWMB decided that the community beluga quota for Pangnirtung should increase from 35 to 41. That final decision was accepted by the DFO Minister.

We note that the correspondence between the NWMB and DFO did not mention the recognition of two populations of beluga within Cumberland Sound, even though the Inuit of Pangnirtung have reported that the different two populations have been recognized by the Inuit of Pangnirtung for many years.

During October 2010 to June 2011, the NWMB reviewed proposals by DFO to list beluga in Cumberland Sound as "threatened" under the Species at Risk Act. The DFO Minister ultimately rejected decisions of the NWMB and listed the beluga as "threatened".

During the listing process, an especially contentious issue centered at the intersection of readily available IQ vs. unavailable scientific information. Based on generations of IQ and more recent Inuit testimony, the Pangnirtung HTA emphasized that two separate beluga populations have occurred within Cumberland Sound for many human generations. That IQ-based position was accepted by the NWMB in 2011 but was rejected by the DFO Minister, contrary to subsection 5.12(e) of the Nunavut Agreement. In 2011, the NWMB found that the IQ supporting the existence of two separate beluga populations in Cumberland Sound was "reliable and persuasive".

In December 2012, the NWMB decided that the basic needs levels of beluga and some other marine mammals would equal the total allowable harvest as established and modified by the NWMB from time to time.

After repeated requests from the Pangnirtung HTA, DFO conducted genetic analyses of samples taken from beluga whales in 2022. In December 2022 DFO presented the genetic results to the Cumberland Sound Beluga Working Group. Of 24 samples evaluated, the majority were from the CSB population (74%), or Clearwater beluga. The remainder (26%) were most similar to whales from the Western Hudson Bay (WHB) population, or "small" beluga. It is unknown whether these proportions from each population were representative of the total harvest in Cumberland Sound, the relative abundance of the two populations in the Sound, or only the coincidental proportions from the small number of samples analyzed.

The above genetic classification of the beluga is generally consistent with IQ. Note that the two populations within Cumberland Sound are referred to differently in the PHTA's current harvesting by-laws for consistency with local references. The "Clearwater" beluga in the PHTA's by-laws are larger animals and concentrate in the area of Clearwater Fiord during early summer, and appear to be comparable to CSB whales from the DFO genetic analyses. On the other hand, the "small" beluga in the PHTA's current by-laws occur mainly on the south side of Cumberland Sound mainly east of Irvine Inlet and appear to be very similar to WHB whales based on ancestral and current IQ, and as suggested by DFO's recent genetic analyses.

In June 2023, DFO confirmed that there is no quota or total allowable harvest for WHB beluga. Nevertheless, DFO has applied the current annual quota of 41 and previous lower quotas to all beluga harvested in Cumberland Sound, despite the consistent objections of the Inuit of Pangnirtung and their HTA for more than 25 years since beluga quotas were first imposed by DFO.

DFO's application of a quota to WHB beluga only within Cumberland Sound appears to be in contradiction of section 5.3.3 of the Nunavut Agreement. The quota of 41 in Cumberland Sound should apply **only** to Clearwater beluga in accordance with the Pangnirtung HTA's current beluga harvesting by-laws.

Inuit harvesters in Pangnirtung can readily determine which population that a harvested beluga may come from based on physical size and other characteristics, and this classification will be recorded in future.

In an email message sent to the Cumberland Sound Beluga Working Group in March 2024 by DFO staff, both the NWMB and DFO reportedly support management of beluga in Pangnirtung based on Inuit-based community management systems. These systems are described by the HTA's beluga harvesting by-laws, and as Recommended below. Once implemented, these measures would be in accordance with sub-section 5.1.2(e) and section 5.3.3 of the Nunavut Agreement.

Consultations:

In 2026, DFO provided documentation about quota changes that occurred in 2000. Neither DFO nor the NWMB provided the Pangnirtung HTA with records of public consultations leading to the current quota level, or to the previous quota levels of 35 or other prior quotas.

According to records of the Cumberland Sound Beluga Working Group in March 2024, both NWMB and DFO support management of beluga in Pangnirtung by Inuit-based community management systems, as long as management details are shared with NWMB and DFO.

In May 2026, M. Ferguson of the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Bord (on behalf of the Pangnirtung HTA) met with C. Friesen of DFO to discuss potential concerns that DFO may have regarding implementation of the current version of the HTA's beluga by-laws. Four concerns or requests were identified: 1) potential inadvertent harvesting of Clearwater beluga after an initial harvest of 41 while Inuit may continue harvesting small (WHB) beluga, 2) potential geographic separation of harvesting of Clearwater and small beluga, 3) potential timing separation of harvesting of Clearwater and small beluga, and 4) more collections of samples from small beluga to continue to examine their genetic differences from Clearwater beluga. Follow-up responses from the Pangnirtung HTA Board were: 1) Although unlikely, any inadvertent harvesting of Clearwater beluga above or below 41 will be compensated by a commensurate adjustment in the quota in the following year, 2) and 3) geographic zones and timing schedules of the two types of belugas are difficult to prescribe because these aspects of their ecology and movements may vary between years, although the two types are not seen in the same places at the same time, and 4) the harvesters and the PHTA will continue to support DFO to collect samples from harvested beluga in Cumberland Sound, although higher payments and more DFO staff assistance should be negotiated.

Recommendations:

The Pangnirtung HTA requests approval from the NWMB of the following:

- Modify the description of the **current quota or Basic Needs Level of 41** for "the Pangnirtung community quota for beluga" (as per item i) in NWMB letter of 17 July 2000 to DFO Minister) **to apply only to Clearwater beluga** in Cumberland Sound.

- Modify the current quota or Basic Needs Level for Clearwater beluga to **enable annual adjustments**, if applicable, for any inadvertent harvesting of Clearwater beluga above or below 41 by a commensurate adjustment in the quota in the following year;

- Modify the description of the **current quota or Basic Needs Level of 41** for "the Pangnirtung community quota for beluga" (as per item i) in NWMB letter of 17 July 2000 to DFO Minister) **to clearly exclude any limitation of harvesting of small beluga, as per the PHTA's beluga harvesting by-laws**.

- Explicitly recognize the ability of Pangnirtung harvesters to distinguish and identify both the larger Clearwater beluga and the smaller beluga as per the Pangnirtung HTA's beluga harvesting by-laws.

- Recognize the Pangnirtung HTA's willingness to continue to provide harvest data and samples from harvested beluga, subject to terms and conditions to be negotiated between the PHTA and DFO.

Prepared by: Michael Ferguson *(on assignment to the Pangnirtung HTA for this file as approved by the Executive Committee of the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board)*

Date: May 15, 2026