

# **Preliminary Report on Elder and Hunter Knowledge of Baffin Island Caribou**

Submitted for consideration at the public hearing of the Nunavut Wildlife  
Management Board

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*The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect  
those of the Department of Environment, Nunavut or Government of Nunavut.*



## ***Executive Summary***

This preliminary report outlines some of the activities that were undertaken to gather information and understanding from elders and hunters from communities that have traditionally or currently harvest from the caribou population. More subjects were gathered but the analysis of the results have not been completed, so this preliminary report has been completed in order to provide some of the most pertinent results to be part of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board's decision making process, including the public hearing scheduled for March 2015. This report explains some of the methods used and some of the key results of the interviews.

This project was conducted from February to April 2013 in the communities of Arctic Bay, Cape Dorset, Clyde River, Hall Beach, Igloolik, Iqaluit, Kimmirut, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet and Qikiqtarjuaq, the Nunavut communities that have traditionally and currently harvest from the Baffin Island caribou population. The 20 elders and hunters interviewed were based on suggestions from their local Hunters and Trappers Organizations or conservation officers.

Regarding caribou abundance, informants indicated that caribou abundance increased over their lifetime peaking around the mid-1990s. After this peak, the caribou abundance started to decline and most respondents indicated that there are few caribou today.

Despite the observed low caribou abundance reported, most respondents indicated that they were not concerned about the future of the Baffin island caribou population. Some respondents indicated that they were concerned about the Baffin island caribou population.

Reasons for not being concerned included that people are expecting their return or that this is a natural behavior for caribou based on past experience or from their elders. Reasons for concern included current harvest practices, the low abundance of caribou and that Baffin Island is an island environment with widespread harvest pressure.

Vegetation was one of the primary factors affecting caribou abundance and distribution, so we asked about the current status of vegetation that people are observing. People indicated that vegetation is starting to regrow to their awareness but that they are not expecting caribou to return to their area in abundance for quite a long time still. Some people indicated that vegetation had grown abundantly and that caribou returning was more imminent.

A range of possible conservation actions were suggested as ways to maintain or revitalize the caribou population. These included limits or restrictions on harvest and on harvesting frequency. It also included statements that caribou are not within our control.

## ***Foreword***

Public and Inuit input into decision making is an important part of wildlife management in Nunavut. To that end, this report is being made available for use in an upcoming public hearing regarding the Baffin Island caribou population prior to its completion. There is still considerable work to be done before this report is considered final. Please share any thoughts or comments on it with:

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## ***Introduction***

This preliminary report outlines some of the activities that were undertaken to gather information and understanding from elders and hunters from communities that have traditionally or currently harvest from the caribou population. More subjects were gathered but the analysis of the results have not been completed, so this preliminary report has been completed in order to provide some of the most pertinent results to be part of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board's decision making process, including the public hearing scheduled for March 2015. This report explains some of the methods used and some of the key results of the interviews.



## ***Materials and Methods***

This project was conducted from February to April 2013 in the communities of Arctic Bay, Cape Dorset, Clyde River, Hall Beach, Igloolik, Iqaluit, Kimmirut, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet and Qikiqtarjuaq, the Nunavut communities that have traditionally and currently harvest from the Baffin Island caribou population.

### **Informant Selection and Interviews**

The Hunters and Trappers Organization within each community was contacted and informed about the project. They were then asked to suggest possible informants that could be spoken with. When possible, Conservation Officers also suggested possible informants.

Potential informants were then contacted individually by telephone or in person and asked to be interviewed about Baffin Island caribou and wildlife management. Those that were interviewed are presented in Table 1. Arrangements were made to meet at the informant's home, in hotel rooms, or other quiet locations. Consent forms were explained and used to familiarize the informants of the project.

Interviews were audio recorded with a Sony IC digital audio recorder under the control of the interviewee.

Interviews were conducted in Inuktitut, with semi-directed interviews.

Honoraria were paid to each informant unless they were interviewed during their working hours.

Table 1: The informants spoken with.

<b>Interviewee</b>
Anonymous
Jacobie Adamie
Levi Evic
David Issigaitok
Jacobie Iqalukjuak
Mathew Saveakjuk Jaw
Joshua Kango
Daniellie Komangapik
Simeonie Olayuk
Josephie Padluq
Elijah Panipakoocho
Solomon Qanatsiak
Qabawa Qatsiya
Daniel Katalik
Matthias Qaunaq
James Qillaq
Isaac Shooyook
Quvianaqtuliak Tapaungai
Abraham Udlayorulluk
Pauloosee Veevee

## **Results**

### **Caribou Abundance**

Informant had a number of messages regarding polar bear abundance (Table 2). The two main messages seemed to be that polar bears are becoming more abundant and that there are problem polar bears. They also indicated that in the past, there were few polar bears.

Other aspects were mentioned as well, such as polar bear habitat and the impact of habitat changes. Drivers of polar bear abundance were also spoken about.

### **Conservation Concern and Reasons**

There were a number of messages regarding climate change (Table 3). The main observation about climate change seemed to be that sea ice does not form as well as it did in the past. The land does not seem to be warmer was another common message.

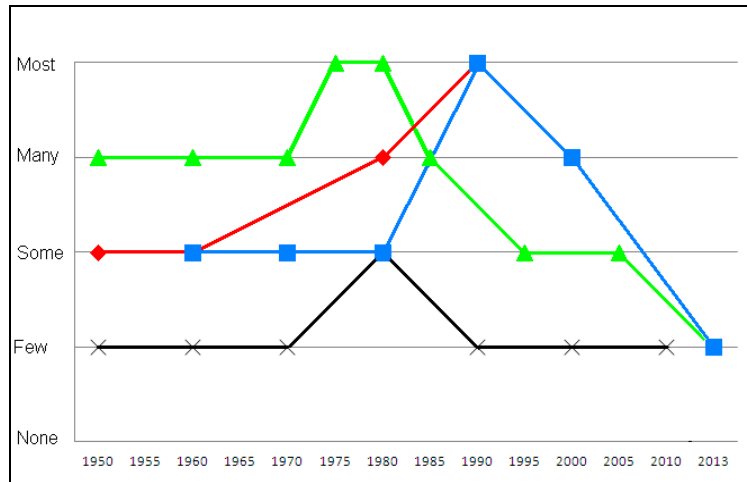
A variety of other observations were also provided. Changes in wind and snow were observed for example. Some changes in wildlife were also mentioned. Respondents seemed to speak less about climate change than they did about polar bear abundance.

### **Vegetation Status**

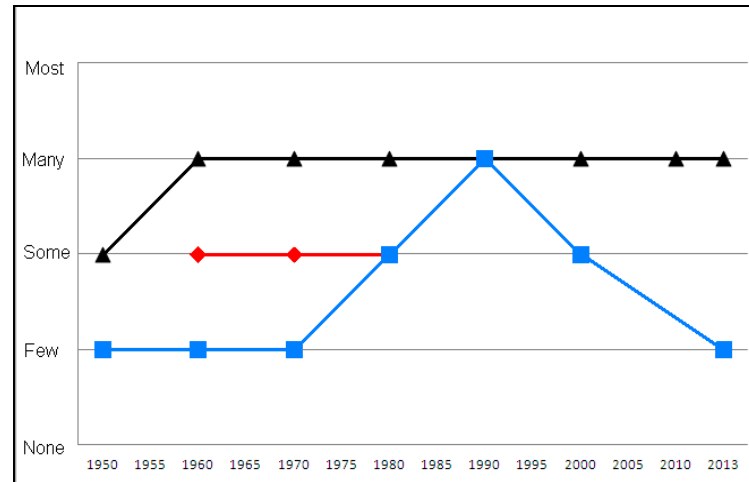
Informants spoke about polar bears and climate change (Table 4). Some suggested that the decrease in ice has likely led to an increase in polar bears. Alternately, other informants indicated that polar bears do not live exclusively on ice. Another common statement was that they are not worried about the polar bear's future. Another theme seemed to be that with climate change, polar bears may pose more of a danger to people. Respondents seemed to speak less about the interaction of polar bears and climate change than they did about climate change.

### **Possible Conservation Actions**

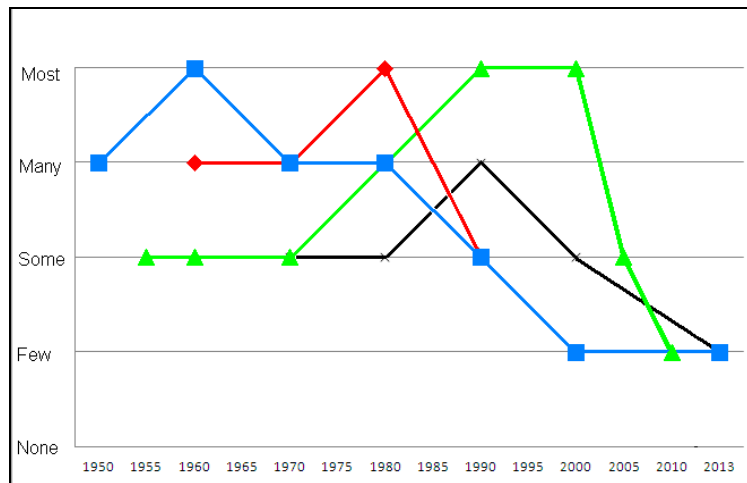
The participation of Inuit was sometimes discussed by the informants (Table 5). A variety of negative comments were made about Inuit-Government relations and the effectiveness of Inuit participation. One suggested barrier to participation was language. There were not too many statements about Inuit participation and there was no dominant statement.



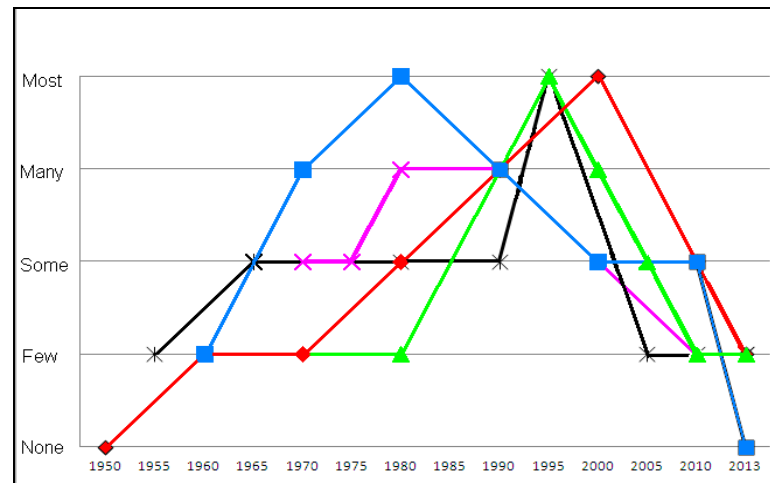
a)



b)



c)



d)

Figure 1 The Baffin caribou abundance over time according to respondents from a) North Baffin, b) Amittuq, c) Northeast Baffin and d) South Baffin.

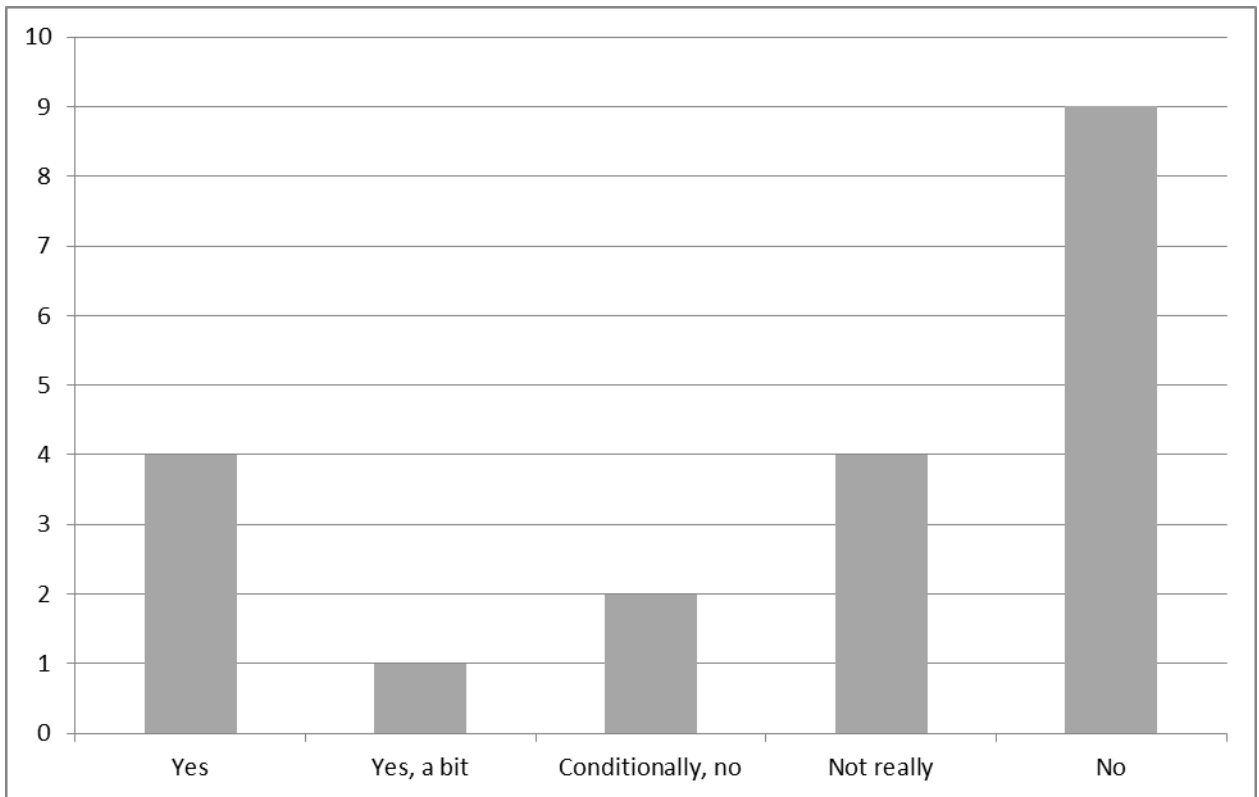


Figure 2 The concern level that elders and hunters had for Baffin Island caribou

Table 2 The reasons for concern that respondents had.

Yes	Elders	Yes, a bit	Elders	Conditionally No	Elders	Not Really	Elders	No	Elders
Current Harvest Practices	1	Baffin Island is an island, with harvest throughout.	1	Harvest a few when they are few then harvest a lot when they've become more abundant.	1	Year by year, abundance changes.	1	I'm expecting them to return	3
Mines and oil.	1	Low caribou abundance	1	These cycles occur naturally	1	Caribou will do what they have to do.	1	Behaving as usual based on past experience/elders words	3
Baffin Island is an island, with harvest throughout.	1			Provided that caribou movements aren't inhibited	1	I'm expecting them to return	1	They have moved to someplace else	2
We're a growing population. There are more hunters.	1					Inuit characteristic is not to put in a great effort to harvest them all.	1	Baffin Island is large	1
						Their abundance is increasing now	1	Will continue to reproduce	1
						They have moved to someplace else	1	Using wildlife less than we were in the past. The number of hunters are reducing.	1
						They are still found in traditional places	1		

Table 3 Comments on the regrowth of vegetation and impacts on caribou.

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
The vegetation is growing.	6
We will have to wait quite a while for caribou to return	4
Don't know	3
There is a lot of caribou food	3
Some land hasn't grown	2
There will be the occasional caribou	2
The return of caribou seems close	2
Still has to grow	2
Seeing caribou food – starting to expect caribou more	1

Table 4 Perspectives on how the Baffin Island caribou population can be maintained or revitalized.

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Restrict or limit harvest for a period	6
They will return themselves – we do not control them.	4
Do not harvest the initial arriving caribou.	2
Harvesting for income is leading to depletion	2
Don't persistently go hunting for caribou.	2
Harvest what you will use.	2
Resource industry should be monitored and regulated.	2
Introduce caribou to adjacent islands for food.	1
Treat wildlife well	1
Do more research and examine Inuit knowledge better so that we can speak with certainty. Use communities well.	1
Reintroduce protection for females with calves.	1
Males are needed for breeding, so don't try to harvest just males.	1
People growing up should be taught by elders about conservation and proper hunting.	1
We don't have to do much.	1
Don't speak too much about them and have good relationships.	1



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