

The most recent population estimate for Cumberland Sound belugas was based on aerial surveys conducted in 1999 (DFO, unpublished data).

ABSTRACT

The summer range of belugas (*Delphinapterus leucas*) in Cumberland Sound was surveyed on 6-9 August 1999 using aerial photographic surveys of the beluga aggregation in Clearwater Fiord and an aerial visual survey in northern (excluding Clearwater Fiord) and western Cumberland Sound. The 6 August 1999 photographic survey of Clearwater Fiord produced a count of 720 belugas visible at or near the water surface. A total of 64 belugas were also counted at or near the surface during the visual surveys over northern and western Cumberland Sound that same day. These surface counts were corrected for diving animals missed during the surveys to produce a population estimate. Initial analysis, based on data from belugas tagged with satellite-linked time-depth recorders in the High Arctic, resulted in a preliminary report of the population estimate of 1,547 belugas (95% CI 1,187 to 1,970). Further analysis, using dive data obtained from belugas tagged and tracked in Cumberland Sound in 1998 and 1999, produced a revised population estimate of 1,960 belugas (90% CI 1,590 to 2,409). Aerial surveys were also flown in 2005 to update the abundance estimate, but due to poor weather and equipment malfunction the results were not considered reliable.

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