

SUBMISSION TO THE NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

Information: X

Decision:

Issue: Update on Entrapment of Beluga in Cumberland Sound

Background:

In fall-early winter, belugas may be observed in small inlets or fiords along the coast of Cumberland Sound, and may appear to be entrapped. To determine whether whales are truly entrapped, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Pangnirtung Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) follow the *draft Action Plan for Trapped Whales*, developed in 2001, and monitor suspected entrapments over several (2 to 3) high tide cycles, to see if they will leave the area independently. If animals do not leave the area independently within this time, attempts are made to herd the animals to open water. If the herding attempts are unsuccessful, it is assumed the animals will die of natural causes, and a humane harvest may be required.

On 31 August 2010, the Pangnirtung HTO reported an entrapment of 3 beluga whales in Targioyak Fiord (65°34'N, 67°42'W) in Cumberland Sound, as well as a later entrapment of 4 beluga whales in Kangiqturjuarlaaq Fiord (66°25'N, 67°16'W), which was reported to DFO by the Pangnirtung HTO on 28 September 2010.

For the Targioyak entrapment, DFO and the HTO agreed that the whales would be left over several high tide cycles to see if they would leave the area independently. If the whales did not leave the areas, a herding attempt would be conducted. On 15 September 2010, DFO updated the NWMB on the situation and advised that in light of the experience from the 2009 entrapment in Targioyak Fiord, a herding attempt should be attempted earlier in the season this year, and that the 23 September high tide cycle might be the best option for a herding attempt. During this time DFO and the Pangnirtung HTO attempted to work closely on this issue, but interactions in late September and early October were affected to some degree by staff absences at the HTO office, and as a result herding attempts could not be contracted. In early October, an aerial survey confirmed that one beluga still remained entrapped in Targioyak Fiord. DFO also contracted to the Pangnirtung HTO to assess the situation, and the HTO confirmed the presence of one beluga in Targioyak Fiord.

For the Kangiqturjuarlaaq entrapment, DFO contracted the Pangnirtung HTO to assess the situation. In early October, the HTO confirmed that no beluga whales remained entrapped in the Kangiqturjuarlaaq Fiord, and they likely left the area during a high tide event. A DFO offshore surveillance flight also confirmed that no beluga remained entrapped in the Kangiqturjuarlaaq Fiord.

In view of unavoidable delays in organizing a herding attempt in Targioyak Fiord, the condition of the affected animal, and the possibility of deteriorating weather conditions, the Pangnirtung HTO and DFO determined the immediate harvest of this animal, was the most humane solution. The Pangnirtung HTO wrote DFO on 21 October to ask permission to humanely harvest the one remaining entrapped beluga. DFO forwarded this letter to the NWMB on 22 October, and requested the NWMB decision on the matter. On 27 October, the NWMB approved the humane harvest of this beluga. The

NWMB decision was confirmed by DFO EAA Director, who notified the Pangnirtung HTO in writing that they could proceed with the humane harvest.

Current Situation:

As of 9 November, the HTO has not decided whether it will proceed with the humane harvest. If the harvest is conducted, then DFO will request that the appropriate biological samples be collected from the harvested animal.

Consultations:

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Date:

9 November 2010