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Mr. Mikidjuk Akavak
Chairperson
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board
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February 23, 2012

RE: request from Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated to extend the existing annual Total Allowable Harvest of three bowhead whales per year for the 2012 and 2013 seasons.

Dear Mr. Akavak:

This is in response to your correspondence of January 24, 2012, addressed to the Honourable Keith Ashfield, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, regarding the request from Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) to extend the existing annual Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of three bowhead whales per year for the 2012 and 2013 seasons. NTI also recommended that the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) conduct a review of the recommendations specified in the Board's TAH decision of March 11, 2009. I have been asked to respond on the Minister's behalf.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) supports NTI's request to extend the TAH of three bowhead whales per year for the 2012 and 2013 hunting seasons. The request is consistent with DFO's current science advice for the Eastern Canada-West Greenland (EC-WG) bowhead population, which was presented at the NWMB's Public Hearing on February 10, 2009. DFO's science advice also considers present harvests of bowhead whales by Inuit in Nunavik and Greenland.

The NWMB has also requested an update on its 2009 recommendations to DFO with respect to the EC-WG bowhead population (i.e., sharing agreements with neighbouring jurisdictions, bowhead catch history and population estimation). With respect to jurisdictional agreements, EC-WG bowheads are harvested by Inuit in Greenland and Nunavik. Because Canada is not a member of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), and although DFO scientific studies are discussed with the IWC Scientific Committee, there is currently no appropriate forum for management discussions with Greenland. Once the appropriate forum is established, Canada and Greenland will begin to discuss shared stewardship of the EC-WG bowhead whale population.



Within Canada, DFO prefers that Nunavut and Nunavik Inuit develop a mutually agreeable sharing arrangement within the existing TAH for EC-WG bowhead harvests. DFO is of the view that this initiative should be led by NTI and Makivik.

With respect to EC-WG bowhead population abundance, I have attached a recent publication for the information of the NWMB and its technical staff. It results from a re-examination of historic, pre-commercial whaling population numbers for this population (see Higdon, attached).

DFO's current population estimate and that of the IWC are similar given the considerable uncertainty derived from the Department's survey data. In September 2011, DFO initiated a process to update the existing abundance estimate for the EC-WG bowhead population. A revised abundance estimate is planned for 2015, at which time DFO will reassess the scientific advice regarding the TAH recommended for EC-WG bowhead whales.

Thank you for writing, and I look forward to continued collaboration in this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Kan
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