

SUBMISSION TO THE
NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD
FOR



Information:

Decision: X

Re: NWMB Decision to Establish Coral Harbour Basic Needs Level for Southampton Island Caribou

Issue

Where a Total Allowable Harvest has been established by the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (“NWMB” or “Board”) and the Minister, the NWMB is required to determine a Basic Needs Level pursuant to Section 5.6.19 of the *Nunavut Agreement*. The Basic Needs Level determines that portion of the Total Allowable Harvest is required to be reserved exclusively for Inuit.

Coral Harbour harvests from the Southampton Island caribou herd and the current Total Allowable Harvest of 1,000 caribou for the community was established by a decision of the NWMB and the Minister in 2019. Given the establishment of the Total Allowable Harvest, the NWMB is required to determine the Basic Needs Level for that community.

Background

Southampton Island Caribou

Caribou were extirpated on Southampton Island by 1953, and in 1967, 48 animals were translocated to Southampton Island from Coats Island. The translocated caribou population quickly grew—benefiting from abundant vegetation, a high female reproductive rate (97% in 1996), and the absence of natural predators. By 1997, the number of caribou on Southampton Island was estimated to be 30,381 animals.

A decline in the abundance of the Southampton Island caribou herd was detected in 2003 and confirmed 2007, when a population survey estimated there were 15,452 caribou. Surveys in 2009 and 2011 indicated that the herd had declined further to 13,953 and 7,902, respectively. The decline was largely attributed to extremely low pregnancy rates caused by the reproductive disease brucellosis (with 50% occurrence

in 2006). Other factors that contributed to the decline in the population included a government-regulated commercial harvest introduced between 1993 and 2009 and extensive icing and extreme freezing events during the winter of 2010/2011 that reduced the herd's access to food sources.

In 2012 and 2013, following the recommendation of the Aiviit Hunters & Trappers Organization, the Nunavut Department of Environment, through ministerial orders, established a Total Allowable Harvest of 1,000 caribou and a non-quota limitation restricting the harvest of females with calves. The harvest limit was subsequently reduced to 800 through a ministerial order in 2014.

An aerial survey in May 2015 revealed a population estimate of 12,297 caribou, suggesting that the population had increased compared to the estimated population of 7,287 animals surveyed in 2013, which was due, in part, to migration from the mainland. After the 2015 population survey revealed an increase in the Southampton Island caribou population, the NWMB and the Minister of Environment increased the Total Allowable Harvest to 1,600 caribou.

In an effort to stabilize the herd, a modification to the Total Allowable Harvest was made in 2019, from 1,600 to 1,000 animals, following surveys in May of 2017 that revealed a decrease in the estimated population. The current Total Allowable Harvest for the community of Coral Harbour remains at 1,000 caribou.

Detailed records of Southampton caribou Total Allowable Harvest are appended to this briefing note for ease of reference.

In the absence of a Basic Needs Level for Coral Harbour, the practice has been to reserve the entire Total Allowable Harvest for Inuit.

Basic Needs Level

Once the NWMB has established a Total Allowable Harvest in accordance with Sections 5.6.16 and 5.6.17 of the *Nunavut Agreement*, the Board is required to determine a Basic Needs Level pursuant to Part 6 of Article 5 of the *Nunavut Agreement*.

The Basic Needs Level shall constitute the first demand on the Total Allowable Harvest. Section 5.6.20 of the *Nunavut Agreement* establishes that, where the Total Allowable Harvest is equal to, or less than, the Basic Needs Level, Inuit shall have the right to the entire Total Allowable Harvest.

In December 2013, the NWMB initiated a proceeding to contemplate establishing a Basic Needs Level for the Southampton Island caribou for the community of Coral Harbour. During the proceeding, the Board adjourned the session to allow the parties time to provide additional submissions.

The NWMB now seeks to resume the decision-making process that was adjourned in 2013 and finalize the Basic Needs Level for Southampton Island caribou.

NWMB Engagement with Co-Management Partners

NWMB 2024 Basic Needs Level Policy Memo

On July 18, 2024, the NWMB informed co-management partners that the process to determine the Basic Needs Level will resume and will rely on available data from the 2014 Nunavut Wildlife Harvest Study.

Following careful internal review that considered the positions of all the parties, including past NWMB processes and opinions received, the Board communicated its determination to stakeholders that, moving forward, it will accept the Harvest Study Steering Committee's interpretation of what is to be included in the Basic Needs Level.

In that regard, the NWMB adopted the Steering Committee's 2002 conclusion that:

“basic needs refers to the amount of harvest which is currently taken for domestic and cultural purposes. ... Harvesting or gathering for the purpose of obtaining skins, feathers, dog food, craft materials etc. would all be acknowledged “basic needs” components if the end use occurred in the hunter's community or entered into inter-settlement trade. Apparently, not eligible for consideration as an item of “basic need”, would be material harvested or gathered for commercial sale as food outside the NSA.”

In the fall of 2024 and winter of 2025, NWMB staff delivered presentations outlining its determination relative to what is to be included in the Basic Needs Level and communicated its plans to restart the process to establish the Basic Needs Level for Coral Harbour Southampton Island caribou to the Kivalliq, Kitikmeot, and Qikiqtani regional wildlife boards at their annual general meetings.

Response from the Government of Nunavut

On July 24, 2024, the Government of Nunavut, through the Minister of Environment, wrote to the NWMB to acknowledge the “long history and the absence of consensus by co-management partners on the Basic Needs Level and expressed his desire to work collaboratively to fully implement the Nunavut wildlife management system.”

Response from Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

In April and July 2025, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (Nunavut Tunngavik) wrote to the NWMB expressing concerns with the Board’s July 2024 memo confirming that Basic Needs Level would be based on the Nunavut Wildlife Harvest Study and exclude commercial harvests intended for sale outside Nunavut. Nunavut Tunngavik argued this represented a departure from the NWMB’s earlier interpretation, supported by a 2009 opinion (“Meehan Opinion”), that all Inuit harvests - including commercial harvests - should be counted towards the determination of the Basic Needs Level and raised a question with respect to the appropriate reference period for the application of Section 5.6.23(b) of the *Nunavut Agreement*.

Nunavut Tunngavik stressed its position that the food security and economic implications of the exclusion of commercial harvests intended for sale outside of Nunavut and requested that the Board pause the process to determine a Basic Needs Level for Southampton Island caribou, reconvene the adjourned 2013 hearing, and allow co-management partners to provide further submissions on what constitutes Basic Needs Level before implementing the methodology.

The NWMB replied in April and August of 2025, clarifying that no final decision on methodology with respect to the calculation of a Basic Needs Level was ever established as ministerial confirmation of the recommendation of the Board decision was not provided. Because no final decision was confirmed, all prior positions, including views on the Meehan opinion, were to be considered as part of the ongoing deliberative process.

In its response to Nunavut Tunngavik, the Board confirmed that it would adopt the Steering Committee’s interpretation of what constitutes “basic needs” and agreed with Nunavut Tunngavik that the proper reference period under section 5.6.23(b) should be 2007–2011. The Board also clarified that the current Basic Needs Level decision will apply only to Coral Harbour, the only community subject to the Total Allowable Harvest for Southampton Island caribou.

Coral Harbour Hunters & Trappers Organization

In May 2025, the NWMB met with the Aiviit Hunters & Trappers Organization in Coral Harbour to provide information on the Basic Needs Level process for Southampton Island caribou and seek feedback on whether any community harvest records existed from the 2007 to 2011 reference period that could support an adjustment to the Basic Needs Level calculation under Section 5.6.23(b) of the *Nunavut Agreement*.

During the meeting, the NWMB staff explained the relationship between Total Allowable Harvests and Basic Needs Level, outlined the calculation methods established under the *Nunavut Agreement* for the Basic Needs Level, and invited the Hunters & Trappers Organization to identify any available data outside of the Wildlife Harvest Study that could influence the calculation of the Basic Needs Level under Section 5.6.23(b) of the *Nunavut Agreement*. Both parties agreed on an August 30 deadline for the Hunters & Trappers Organization to provide any records; however, no records were received by that date.

Calculating the Basic Needs Level for Southampton Island Caribou

Nunavut Agreement context

Section 5.6.23 of the *Nunavut Agreement* requires that, where a Total Allowable Harvest is established with respect to a stock or population not previously subject to a total allowable harvest (such as Southampton Island caribou)¹ the NWMB shall calculate the Basic Needs Level **as the higher of:**

- a) An amount based on data from the original five-year NWMB Harvest Study, calculated according to the method described in Sub-section 5.6.21 (a) of the *Nunavut Agreement*, or, where a Hunters & Trappers Organization has previously elected the method described in Sub-section 5.6.21(b), the harvest level of the stock or population in the identified year; or
- b) The aggregate of the greatest amount harvested in any one year during the five years prior to the imposition of a Total Allowable Harvest and the average annual amount taken over the five years of the NWMB Harvest Study, which aggregate is then divided by two.

Coral Harbour Hunters & Trappers Organization did not nominate a specific year during the NWMB Harvest Study to use in the calculation of Basic Needs Level and the

¹ The first ever limitation for Southampton Island caribou harvest was put in place in 2012.

method to calculate the Basic Needs Level described in Section 5.6.21(b) of the *Nunavut Agreement* cannot be used.

In the absence of provided harvest records during the five years prior to the imposition of a Total Allowable Harvest in 2012, the formula allowing for an adjustment to the calculation of the Basic Needs Level under Section 5.6.23(b) of the *Nunavut Agreement* is not applicable.

In light of the above, pursuant to Section 5.6.23 of the *Nunavut Agreement*, the Board shall calculate the Coral Harbour Basic Needs Level for the Southampton Island caribou herd using the formula prescribed in Section 5.6.21(a), which states that:

S.5.6.21(a): the aggregate of the greatest amount harvested in any one year during the study, and the average annual amount harvested over the five years of the Study, which aggregate is then divided by two;

Coral Harbour Basic Needs Level for Southampton Island caribou

Under Section 5.6.21(a): The aggregate of the greatest amount harvested in any one year during the NWMB Harvest Study and the average annual amount harvested over the five years of the Study, which aggregate is then divided by two:

$$\text{BNL} = \frac{\text{Max(Harvest)} + \text{Avg(Harvest)}}{2}$$

Where:

- Max(Harvest) = The greatest amount harvested in any one year during the NWMB Harvest Study.
- Avg(Harvest) = The average annual amount harvested over the five years of the NWMB Harvest Study.

The greatest amount of caribou harvested per year recorded during the NWMB Harvest Study in Coral Harbour is 1940 (Table 1, in year 1999).

The average amount of caribou harvested during the 5-year NWMB Harvest Study in Coral Harbour is 1,470 (Table 1).

$$\text{BNL} = \frac{\text{Max(Harvest)} + \text{Avg(Harvest)}}{2}$$

Max(Harvest) = 1940 and Avg(Harvest) = 1470:

$$\text{BNL} = \frac{1940 + 1470}{2}$$

$$\text{BNL} = \frac{3410}{2}$$

Incorporating the available information into the formula for the Basic Needs Level established under the *Nunavut Agreement*, the resulting Basic Needs Level is determined to be 1,705 caribou.

NWMB Decision

The NWMB hereby establishes that the Basic Needs Level for Coral Harbour for the harvesting of Southampton Island caribou is 1,705 caribou.

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Table 1. Caribou records in the community of Coral Harbour during the five-year (1997-2001) Nunavut Wildlife Harvest Study conducted by the NWMB.

NWMB Wildlife Harvest Study Date	Community	Species	Number Harvested
Year 1 (1997)	Coral Harbour	Caribou	1,376
Year 2 (1998)	Coral Harbour	Caribou	1,213

Year 3 (1999)	Coral Harbour	Caribou	1,940
Year 4 (2000)	Coral Harbour	Caribou	1,693
Year 5 (2001)	Coral Harbour	Caribou	1,128
5-Year Average			1,470