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## Summary of Evidence and Argument

### Consideration of the total allowable harvest

#### *Input from the Department of Environment*

The Department of Environment 2015–2017 science study results (abundance, productivity, and body condition index) suggest that the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation is healthy. The abundance estimate of 1,525 is very close to the 1998–2000 estimate of 1,592, indicating a stable population. The survey report shows that the proportion of adult females relative to males increased to 0.61 compared to 0.57 in the 1998–2000 study. The report also showed a cub-of-the-year litter size of 1.61 (range = 1.51–1.70) and a yearling litter size of 1.53 (range = 1.41–1.61), all in the typical range for healthy populations with good population growth potential. The NWMB heard that density and reproductive performance indices for the Gulf of Boothia are higher than those reported in other polar bear subpopulations (e.g. Baffin Bay, Foxe Basin, Western Hudson Bay, Southern Hudson Bay, and the Chukchi Sea). Rates of migration between the Gulf of Boothia sub-population and neighbouring subpopulations in M'Clintock Channel, Foxe Basin, and Lancaster Sound are unknown and may have influenced the current population abundance estimates.

The Department of Environment conducted an Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit study in 2020. The Department of Environment staff and consultants interviewed active hunters and elders from Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, Kugaaruk, Nauyasat, Igloodik, and Sanirajak via zoom to document their knowledge of polar bears. The study results suggest the Gulf of Boothia subpopulation is increasing. This is based on reports of increased observations of healthy bears, including females with cubs and young bears. Feedback from Inuit interviewed suggested that polar bear management today must find ways to address the lack of Inuit knowledge. The Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit study was submitted to complement the scientific survey to provide further evidence of female and cub survival and good body condition.

#### *Harvest records*

The NWMB reviewed harvest records submitted by the Department of Environment for the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation. The records show that communities have historically harvested below the TAH of 74, with an average harvest of 65.8 polar bears per





year (88.9 percent of the TAH) in the last five years (2016–2021).

### *Input from co-management partners*

The NWMB considered oral and written evidence and argument from co-management partners during the March 2021 and June 2022 Regular Meetings and records of community consultation attended by NWMB staff. The NWMB also took account of Inuit responses included in the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit study.

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) repeated their caution in both Regular Meetings that there is a risk associated with maintaining the TAH at 74 because the harvest sex ratio was changed from 2:1 to 1:1. ECCC said that a TAH of 74 under the 1:1 harvest ratio would result in an increase in the number of females that may be harvested. To explain this, ECCC stated adult females are the most important contributors to population growth. They recommended conducting a harvest risk assessment to assess the potential risks from the increased female harvest.

The Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB) and Taloyoak HTOs recommended an increase in the TAH. Taloyoak HTO said they would like the TAH to increase to 100. Naujaat and Gjoa Haven HTOs supported Taloyoak HTOs' position.

The NWMB asked affected communities to justify their recommendation to increase the TAH, given the current TAH is not fully used. The NWMB heard that when the 2:1 harvest sex ratio was in place, communities proactively closed the harvest once the female portion of the TAH was reached to avoid female overharvest and subsequent quota reductions. The NWMB understands this practice led to the accumulation of mostly male credits (84% of the accumulated credits at present are male credits). In 2019, the 2:1 harvest sex ratio was replaced by the 1:1 harvest sex ratio. HTO representatives said they do not expect the same level of under-harvesting under the 1:1 harvest system.











### *Need for improved communication regarding harvest credits*

The Nunavut's polar bear harvest co-management system has undergone significant changes since 2019. The NWMB heard more calls in its most recent Regular Meeting on the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation TAH for improved communication and information dissemination between the Government of Nunavut and Regional Wildlife Organizations and Hunters Trappers Organizations. These calls emphasized credit accumulation and use, as well as harvester support programs. Some communities stated that until recently, they were not aware of their harvest credit status. The Minister's statement about the Department of Environment's commitment to continue working with co-management partners remains valid and important to pursue.

The NWMB continues to encourage co-management partners to work together towards sustained engagement, improved communication, increased transparency, and constructive feedback. The NWMB was encouraged to hear that Department of Environment staff are working with KRWB and other Regional Wildlife Board staff to find agreeable solutions to the credit issue. NWMB staff will continue to support and facilitate communication among co-management partners on these matters as much as possible.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Polar bear management in Nunavut is complex. The 2019 Nunavut Polar Bear Management Plan represents a significant achievement for setting out a shared vision for the approach to wildlife management for this species. However, serious issues still need attention, such as counting polar bears killed to defend life and property as part of the TAH, the definition of subpopulations and the respective management unit boundaries, and the co-management administration of polar bear harvesting (and credits). The NWMB stands by its recommendations from its February 1, 2022, HACCs decision letter again now as it modifies the TAH for the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation, a situation where a significant number of accumulated credits will also, as a consequence, be reset.

The NWMB looks forward to your reply and completion of the *Nunavut Agreement* Article 5 decision-making process. If you have questions regarding this letter, do not hesitate to contact the NWMB.







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Minister of Environment  
Ministaat Avatiliqiyitkut  
Ministre de l'Environnement

Sincerely,

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Cc. Henry Coman, A/Deputy Minister, Environment