



NTI Submission SARA listing of beluga

Issue: The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has assessed the Eastern High Arctic- Baffin Bay population as “Special Concern”.

Background:

Under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA), governments must seek community input before bringing any issues to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) for decision. The process for *SARA* listing consultations in Nunavut is detailed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the federal government and the NWMB which harmonizes the listing process under *SARA* with the NLCA. The *SARA*-NLCA Harmonization MOU outlines a process in which the federal government conducts public consultations with affected communities before seeking NWMB approval for species listings.

Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay Population

Recent aerial surveys of belugas occupying the Canadian High Arctic during the summer yield an estimate of abundance, corrected for submerged animals, of 21,213 (95% CI = 10,985 to 32,619) (Innes *et al.* 2002b).

The Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population is the subject of scrutiny and continuing research in view of the likely overexploitation in West Greenland (Innes and Stewart 2002). The West Greenland group might well be a separate population (de March *et al.* 2002, Heide-Jørgensen *et al.* 2003).

The summer harvest of belugas in the High Arctic totals less than 100 individuals a year (DFO 1999). Innes and Stewart (2002), in a modeling exercise, estimated that the number of belugas spending the summer in the High Arctic, and which also remained in the Baffin Bay – North Water area in the winter, was 17,328 (5,750 - 27,996) with a maximum sustainable yield of 317 (25 - 1,107). They conclude that current harvests are below maximum sustainable yield.

In 2004, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada assessed the Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population as “Special Concern”.

In a response received by DFO during consultations in summer of 2008 two affected HTOs responded:

In 14th July 2008 Resolute Bay HTO responded by not supporting the listing. They stated that there are abundant whales observed during the summer time. Resolute Bay hunters only catch what they can eat and none is hunted commercially.

In 21st July 2008 Taloyoak HTO responded that they don't want belugas listed as "Special Concern". The board met and stated that they don't want belugas listed as a species at risk.

On October 1 2009, letter to then acting NWMB chairperson Harry Flaherty, Virginia Potter, director general Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada wrote " The Minister is considering listing the Cumberland Sound population as "threatened" and **NOT** listing the Eastern High Arctic- Baffin Bay population on Schedule 1 of the act.

Beluga is essential to Inuit health and as a seasonal alternative to the high cost of store bought foods. Any listing of a species that is essential to Inuit diet, even though it does not impact harvesting is seen by Inuit that the species is deemed to be in danger by COSEWIC.

In a social-economic analysis done by DFO, a survey done in 1996 clearly stated that there may be no serious threats to the beluga and may be nearing its carrying capacity. Still in 2004 COSEWIC assessed the Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay as a species of "Special Concern"

Recommendation and concerns raised by NTI:

- There is no support to list the Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay by the Resolute Bay and Taloyoak HTOs.
- The West Greenland group might well be a separate population.
- The summer harvest of belugas in the High Arctic total less than 100 individuals a year, well below the maximum sustainable yield of 317 animals for the High Arctic.
- The Canadian High Arctic estimate of 21,213 animals is not a conservation concern.
- The federal Minister in a letter to NWMB last year is quoted, that the minister is considering not listing the Eastern High Arctic- Baffin Bay population.
- NTI will support the Resolute Bay and Taloyoak HTO's recommendation not to list the beluga as "Special Concern".

NTI's main concern is that RWOs, HTOs and community opinions and concerns are taken into account as you make your decision on the listing of Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay as “special concern” under the Species At Risk Act.

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