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Minister of Environment  
Minista Avatiliritjutinut  
Ministre de l'Environnement

August 30, 2007

Joe Tigullaraq  
Chairperson  
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board  
P.O. Box 1379  
Iqaluit, Nunavut  
X0A 0H0

Dear Mr. Tigullaraq;

**RE: NWMB Decision on Western Hudson Bay Polar Bears, June 2007**

Thank you for your June 20, 2007 letter describing the decision of the NWMB on the total allowable harvest (TAH) for the western Hudson Bay (WH) polar bear population.

To reiterate, your decision contains two components:

- 1) That the TAH for WH polar bears will be 38 for the July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008 year; and
- 2) That, if no new significant information becomes available, the TAH for WH polar bears will be 8, beginning on July 1, 2008.

I hereby accept your decision, and as per section 5.3.10 of the NLCA, I will proceed immediately to implement it. Note, however, that only the first part of this decision can be implemented at this time: specifically, making the appropriate changes to the *Polar Bear TAH Order* for the current year, 2007/2008. The second part is, of course pending any new significant information that may come available during the intervening period. If no new significant information becomes available before the start of the 2008/2009 season, I will be in a position to implement the second component.

As you are aware, this fall my department is planning to conduct a helicopter survey to cover areas of the WH population that were not

covered by previous CWS surveys. I suggest that, following the completion of this survey, our respective staff meet to review the results, and to review any other available information, to determine if it constitutes "new significant information". This of course will be an important determination, as if it is felt to constitute new available information, then I feel that an appropriate process would be for the NWMB to again review the WH TAH.

It is important to note that my department will not be able to produce a new population estimate based upon results from the 2007 survey of the Kivalliq coast, as it is not an inventory project. The result of this falls survey will be the proportion of marked bears versus unmarked bears captured during this survey. If the proportion of marked bears is much lower than that in the CWS study area, it would suggest that a portion of the population is missed during CWS surveys. This would indicate a need to refine the population survey route in the future, and further indicate that the survival rates and published population estimate may be biased. The degree of any difference in the portion of bears marked could indicate the relative extent of the bias.

In addition to the decision regarding the TAH, you have made a number of recommendations, to which I can respond as follows:

**1. *NWMB Recommendation:*** *Immediately implement the community-based polar bear deterrent plans*

**Response:** Each community in Nunavut, including those harvesting from WH, has a community polar bear deterrent plan in place. We have struggled with resources to fully implement these plans, but I am pleased to advise that we are presently developing a new dedicated wildlife deterrent specialist position. Working with Conservation Officers, this position will coordinate wildlife deterrent activities throughout Nunavut, and be responsible for managing the implementation of the community deterrent plans. I hope to have this position staffed in the fall.

**2. *NWMB Recommendation:*** *Develop and implement a compensation program for losses that affect the sport hunt industry and for property damaged by problem bears.*

**Response:** This issue, of course, transcends the harvest of polar bears in WH, and has implications territory wide. Wildlife populations naturally fluctuate and migrate, and are affected in the short,



medium, and long term by factors both human caused and natural. Therefore there are many implications for the government to consider in providing compensation to wildlife businesses, and individuals when a wildlife population has declined, or otherwise when harvesting or the value of harvesting is reduced. My department will discuss this issue with other GN departments and reply to you in the fall. With regard to compensating individuals for property damage caused by wildlife, this issue again has broad implications. This second issue, in particular the root causes of problem bear damage, and ways to prevent that damage, will be analyzed in association with the implementation of the polar bear deterrent plans.

**3. *NWMB Recommendation:*** *Develop a management plan for the WH polar bear population*

**Response:** The Polar Bear Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) among local HTO's and my department were finalized in 2005, and constitute effective management plans. I recognize that these have not been called management plans, but that is what they essentially are. I suggest that if the NWMB does not feel that they constitute management plans, or if some elements are missing, then our respective staff should meet to discuss what may be necessary to address that. I do feel that it is necessary to revisit the MOU to update changes in the TAH and possible changes in the current target population of 1,400 polar bears. In addition, my department is actively involved in developing an inter-jurisdictional research and management agreement with Manitoba and Parks Canada for the polar bears in WH. The NWMB will continue to be involved in the formation of this agreement. The infrastructure of the Nunavut co-management process and the updated MOU for WH will be incorporated in the language of the inter-jurisdictional agreement.

**4. *NWMB Recommendation:*** *An IQ survey (with NWMB funding) of polar bear movements from the Seal River to the northern boundary of the WH population.*

**Response:** As you may be aware, we have recently staffed a position to support the collection and use of IQ information, and we expect to be able to make substantial progress in this area in the coming months. In the meantime, I will have my staff make contact with your staff to discuss possible IQ studies for WH, taking into account available human and financial resources.

5. **NWMB Recommendation:** *Approach the Manitoba Government regarding potential modifications to the Churchill Polar Bear Program, with the intent of reducing the number of problem bears that are destroyed.*

**Response:** As you are aware, Manitoba does not have a polar bear hunt, and they have developed a substantial tourism industry around polar bear tours. Therefore, their bear program is inherently designed to keep bear kills to a minimum, balancing this with the need to protect human life and property. However, as noted above, we are in the process of developing an inter-jurisdictional agreement with Manitoba and Parks Canada for research and management of polar bears in WH. As part of this initiative, we will discuss the polar bear deterrent program in and around Churchill, Manitoba, and raise this issue with their officials.

I would like to thank the NWMB for this decision on what is a complex, and very important matter, and I further appreciate the support you have indicated for the upcoming survey of WH.

Sincerely,



Patterk Netser