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Minister of Environment
Minista Avatiliritjutinut
Ministre de l'Environnement

RECEIVED SEP 21 2006

September 11, 2006

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

Dear Mr. Tigullaraq;

Re: Conservation concerns about the Western Hudson Bay and Baffin Bay Polar Bear Populations which may require a management response to modify the established Total Allowable Harvest (TAH).

Thank you for your July 5th, 2006 letter in which you've requested the most updated reports on the above mentioned polar bear populations from the Department of Environment (DOE).

Please be aware that the Polar Bear Technical Committee (PBTC) has utilized all current information to complete their most recent status report on polar bears, and this status report is now available through the PBTC on request. In addition, please note that the interim and final reports for the Western Hudson Bay (WH) population of polar bears are developed and distributed by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) as the lead investigators for this population.

I would also like draw your attention to the planned polar bear mark and re-capture survey scheduled for completion August/September 2006. Local knowledge had raised concerns that a portion of the WH population north of the Nunavut/Manitoba border was being overlooked in the study design of CWS. Plans to account for this possible oversight have been developed based on a cooperative effort between CWS, Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB), Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Kivalliq Wildlife Board, and DOE. As the results of this survey will not be available until September at the earliest, I respectfully suggest that the NWMB postpone making a decision on the TAH until this new information becomes available.

The Baffin Bay (BB) polar bear population study was concluded 1997 and the results distributed to all stakeholders with recommended quota adjustments. There is no new scientific information at present, but we have been made aware through Greenland harvest reporting that their average annual take of BB bears has greatly increased over the 1997 levels. Nunavut also increased their take in December 2004 based primarily on IQ that suggested that the Baffin Bay (BB) population of polar bears was either stable or increasing. Greenland announced in October 2005 that they would be moving to a community-allocated quota system, and in January 2006 they announced their harvest limits. A review of their harvest limits reveal that given the number of bears taken by Greenland since 1997, the combined Nunavut Greenland harvest limit is likely still unsustainable. Working through Foreign Affairs Canada and CWS, my department will be entering into discussions with Greenland regarding this inter-jurisdictional conservation issue.

While I expect that your staff have these reports already, just in case they do not I have attached the 1997 BB survey results, the interim report for the CWS WH study, the most recent PBTC Status report on polar bears, and the harvest limits announced by Greenland, however, we do not have the interim report for the CWS WH study. NWMB should request this directly from CWS. This constitutes all of the current available information on these populations.

I can confirm that my department will communicate any new information regarding these two polar bear populations the moment it becomes available. I trust your board will find this information helpful in its consideration of the management of polar bears in WH and BB. If your staff has any additional technical questions or require clarification they are welcome to contact our wildlife research division at any time. In the meantime do not hesitate to contact my office should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



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