

# **Public and Inuit Interests, Western Hudson Bay Polar Bears and Wildlife Management: Results of a Public Opinion Poll in Western Hudson Bay Communities**

Moshi Kotierk  
Social Scientist Researcher  
Department of Environment  
Government of Nunavut

## **Executive Summary**

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement provides a clear indication of the wildlife management system that will exist in Nunavut. For example, the objective of the NLCA is to create a wildlife management system that:

- is governed by, and implements, principles of conservation,
- fully acknowledges and reflects the primary role of Inuit in wildlife harvesting,
- serves and promotes the long-term economic, social and cultural interests of Inuit harvesters,
- as far as practical, integrates the management of all species of wildlife,
- invites public participation and promotes public confidence, particularly amongst Inuit, and
- enables and empowers the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board to make wildlife management decisions pertaining thereto.

Thus, through the NLCA, a number of human dimensions have been included in wildlife management.

Here, we conduct a public opinion poll of residents of Arviat, Baker Lake, Chesterfield Inlet, Rankin Inlet and Whale Cove, communities in Nunavut that harvest from the western Hudson Bay polar bear population, about:

- their priorities for the Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment, and wildlife managers;
- polar bears, including determining preferred polar bear population levels
- wildlife management performance and trust; and,
- participation through the Department of Environment.

A total of 106 northerners were interviewed with 52, 2, 7, 35, and 10 people from Arviat, Baker Lake, Chesterfield Inlet, Rankin Inlet and Whale Cove, respectively.

Regarding people's priorities:

- The Government of Nunavut should focus on housing, education and employment.
- The Department of Environment should focus on mining and wildlife.
- Wildlife managers should focus on polar bears and caribou.

Regarding polar bears, most respondents indicated that:

- There are currently 'the most' polar bears.
- They prefer that there are 'some' polar bears.
- The polar bear abundance level is above their preference.
- The polar bear abundance level is within their tolerance.
- Most people indicated that they were not concerned about the future of the western Hudson Bay polar bear population.

Regarding wildlife management:

- The performance of elders, conservation officers, and hunters and trappers organizations received the highest ratings.
- The performance of bureaucrats, legislators and the Government of Nunavut received the lowest ratings.
- Elders, conservation officers and Hunters and Trappers Organizations were the most trusted wildlife management groups.
- Bureaucrats, legislators, and scientists were the least trusted wildlife management groups.

Regarding public participation with the Department of Environment:

- The Department of Environment was rated highly for 'courteous treatment', 'providing understandable information', and 'accuracy of information'.
- The Department of Environment was rated poorly for 'use of input', 'response to concerns', and having a 'fair decision making process'.

These results could be used in informing decision-making in Nunavut and measuring the impacts of those decisions. It may be possible to learn more about this by examining how other jurisdictions, such as the Canadian federal government, integrate societal values and opinions into decision-making.