SUBMISSION TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information: **Decision: X**

Issue: Caribou Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) recommendation for Southampton Island (SHI) population.

Background:

Ongoing studies on the Southampton Island caribou have shown that the population has declined from 30,381 to 7,762 caribou between 1997 and 2011, representing a drop of approximately 75% (Campbell et al. 2011). The Department of Environment (DOE) also last examined the condition of SHI caribou in March 2010 and found the herd's general health to be extremely poor, with pregnancy rates falling from 80% in 2000 to below 40% in 2011. In addition, an estimated Brucella prevalence in excess of 50% was recorded indicating a resurgence of the disease in the population (Campbell et al. 2011).

The decline in health and productivity of the population has been exacerbated by a dramatic increase in harvesting rates associated with the high volume of export of SHI caribou from Coral Harbour to communities across Nunavut. Driven by demand from other Nunavut communities (Baffin Island communities, in particular, where caribou are scarce) advertised through popular social media websites, the export market alone had harvested an estimated 779 caribou up to January 10th, 2012. Overall estimated harvest levels for the first six months of the harvest year (July, 2011 to January, 2012) were estimated at more than 1,600 caribou, which exceeds the estimated sustainable limit of 1,500 caribou per year. Current projections indicate that if harvest levels are maintained, the total harvest for the 2012 season will be at least 2,300 caribou, which is 808 caribou over the sustainable limit of 1,500 caribou per year. DOE estimates that if these harvest rates are not dramatically and immediately reduced, the SHI caribou population could be extirpated within 3 to 4 years.

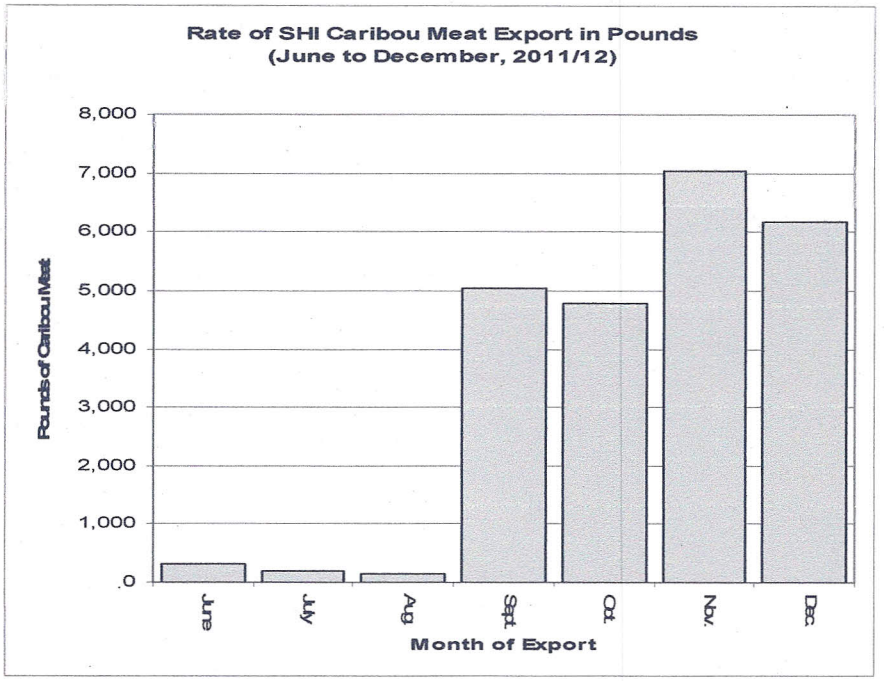

Figure 1 Airfreight records indicating pounds of Southampton Island caribou meat shipped off the Island per month. Baffin Island communities make up the predominant destinations.

Consultations:

Community meetings and consultations with the Coral Harbour HTO and DOE personnel occurred in the fall of 2011. The caribou conservation issue was discussed at length and the HTO committed to working with the community to reduce the harvest to sustainable levels (1,500 caribou per year).

Estimates of updated harvest levels for winter, 2011 and early 2012 indicated that attempts to reduce the harvest were not successful. DOE met with the Coral Harbour HTO again in March, 2012 and DOE received a formal letter (Kadlak 2012 and Arreak, 2012) requesting immediate management action in the form of a Total Allowable Harvest, as well as two Non-Quota Limitations and associated communications to address the conservation concern. Specifically, the HTO requested that the Minister make an interim decision to immediately address the SHI caribou conservation issue by implementing a TAH of 600 caribou for the remainder of the 2011/2012 harvest year.

Recommendations:

Based on the current conservation status of the SHI caribou population, DOE recommends a TAH of 1,000 caribou per year for the 2012/2013 harvest year, effective July 01, 2012.

The current population status also warrants the establishment of additional management action. DOE also recommends that, consistent with the HTO request, the NWMB establish a Non-Quota Limitation (NQL) to restrict harvest of mature bulls and cow/calf pairs in this population.

Both the TAH and NQL recommendations will be reassessed for the 2013/2014 harvest year, based on a new population estimate, which will be determined by the population study planned to take place in June, 2012.

References:

Arreak, Hon. J. 2012. Letter to Noah Kadlak, Chairperson, Coral Harbour HTO.

Campbell, M., Boulanger, J., and Lee, D. 2011. Population Dynamics of the Southampton Island Caribou Herd. Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment, Wildlife Status Report.

Kadlak, N. 2012. Letter to Hon. James Arreak, Minister of Environment.

Date: April 24, 2012