

# **NORTH SLAVE MÉTIS ALLIANCE**

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May 13, 2016

Daniel Shewchuk  
A/Chairperson  
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board  
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## **Via Email**

Dear Mr. Shewchuk:

RE: Written Response to the Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment's  
Proposal to Establish Total Allowable Harvest of 30 Bathurst Caribou

The North Slave Métis Alliance ("NSMA") is an Aboriginal organization that represents s.35 Aboriginal rights-bearing Métis people in the area north and east of Great Slave Lake, Northwest Territories.

The NSMA respectfully submits our Written Submission respecting the Total Allowable Harvest ("TAH") recommendation, by the Government of Nunavut, to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board ("NWMB"). NSMA appreciates the opportunity to participate in this process.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Sincerely,

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## **The North Slave Métis Alliance Written Submission**

### **Background**

The North Slave Métis Alliance ("NSMA") members have a good *prima facie* claim to the Aboriginal right to harvest caribou north of Great Slave Lake, NWT. The proposed Bathurst Caribou TAH (the "Proposal") has potential adverse effects on the NSMA members' ability to exercise their Aboriginal rights, now and into the future.

It is also NSMA's mandate to exercise Métis responsibility to protect the environment, including wildlife.

The NSMA participates in this proceeding to ensure that the decision by NWMB does not adversely affect NSMA members' Aboriginal rights.

### **Party Status**

NSMA requests NWMB to grant a Party Status to the NSMA. NWMB will be considering the Proposal by the Government of Nunavut, to allocate the TAH of 30 male Bathurst Caribou to the people of Nunavut. In the context of rapid and sustained decline of the Bathurst Caribou population, and harvesting restrictions that are in effect in the NWT, the decision by the NWMB may cause adverse effects on NSMA members' Aboriginal right to harvest caribou.

NSMA, as a representative body of traditional harvesters of Bathurst Caribou, participates regularly in collaborative initiatives that aim to protect Bathurst Caribou. These include Bathurst Caribou Range Planning Working Group and Traditional Knowledge monitoring programs at various diamond mines in the NWT.

Respecting management of Barren-ground Caribou, NSMA has also participated, as an official intervenor, in regulatory processes on the basis of NSMA members' Aboriginal rights. These include proceedings under the authorities of Wekheezhii Renewable Resources Board, Nunavut Impact Review Board, and Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board.

In addition, NSMA is invited to participate in the Bathurst Caribou Collaborative Management Advisory Committee, and has an Intervenor Status in Nunavut Planning Commission's land use planning process.

In these groups and initiatives, the NSMA has often worked with representatives from Nunavut on the issue of Bathurst Caribou management.

Given the gravity of the circumstances, NSMA's experience in collaborative management, and potential adverse effects on NSMA members' Aboriginal rights, we believe that the NSMA should be heard, by the NWMB, as a Party to this proceeding.

## Total Allowable Harvest

### *State of the Bathurst Caribou Herd*

The NSMA understands that the Bathurst Caribou population is in a perilous state, for reasons not yet clearly known. Since 2012, Bathurst Caribou population has declined by estimated 37%. Compared to 1986, the estimated decline is a staggering 95%, with no sign of recovery.

Natural population fluctuation, habitat loss, climate change, development, disruption of migration route, predation, and harvest levels have all been named as potential drivers for this decline. Currently, there is no consensus on the relative impact of these potential drivers.

### *Current Initiatives*

A number of initiatives are ongoing to address the decline of Bathurst Caribou population.

Bathurst Caribou Range Planning Working Group is a collaborative initiatives with NWT and NU Aboriginal communities and respective Territorial Governments. This process primarily addresses the habitat loss/disturbance and development-related concerns.

Environmental Assessment processes by Nunavut Impact Review Board and Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board can require large development projects to incorporate mitigation measures to reduce their impacts on caribou.

The Government of Northwest Territories and Tlicho Government have recently submitted a joint-proposal for community-led wolf management program, to the Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board. The proposal also outlines various caribou and predator monitoring programs. NSMA supported this proposal as an intervenor.

In addition, NSMA is an active partner in the long-term management of Bathurst Caribou, through the establishment of Bathurst Caribou Collaborative Management Advisory Committee.

Throughout these processes, NSMA has consistently been on the side of caution to provide the most protection for the Bathurst Caribou population.

### *Harvest Restriction*

Despite the efforts, Bathurst Caribou continues to decline in number, with no signs of recovery.

The Government of Northwest Territories implemented the Bathurst Caribou Mobile Protection Zone in 2014-15 harvest season, as a conservation measure to prevent any Aboriginal harvest from taking place within the zone. In December 2015, the Government of Northwest Territories and Tlicho Government have submitted, to the Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board, a joint-proposal for temporary harvest restriction of 0 ("zero") Bathurst

Caribou. The proposal was to continue the Mobile Protection Zone in the NWT. As an affected Aboriginal organization, NSMA participated in the public hearing, and supported the harvest restriction of zero Bathurst Caribou from 2016 to 2019, if the declining trend continued.

Recognizing that the cumulative effects on Bathurst Caribou is already significant, and that no extra adverse effects are acceptable, NSMA has supported fair and equitable harvest restriction of this herd in the NWT. Given the population trend, other initiatives already in place, and the responsibilities that the Aboriginal communities in the NWT are currently bound, NSMA is not in favor of the TAH of 30 male Bathurst Caribou in Nunavut.

NSMA recommends the NWMB, for the purpose of protecting the Bathurst Caribou population and future traditional harvesters of this herd, to put in place a temporary closure of harvest activities from the Bathurst Caribou herd.

Having said that, the NSMA is cognizant of the Inuit peoples' rights and well-being in the affected areas. As NSMA stated in the public hearings held under the auspices of Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board, our preference is to make important management decisions through collaborative government-to-government discussions.

NSMA would like to express our strong support for expediently establishing a collaborative long-term management mechanism for Bathurst Caribou, which includes affected groups in NWT and NU. The recent Report of Environmental Assessment on Jay Project by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board also comments that the GNWT has been over-due to roll out a long-term Bathurst Caribou management mechanism.

### Conclusion

NSMA recognizes that temporary closure of harvest is a difficult decision to many Aboriginal people who rely on the Bathurst Caribou for their physical and spiritual well-being. This is equally true to the NSMA members. NSMA members have not harvested from Bathurst Caribou since 2010, due in part to the rapid decline of the herd. Despite the dire shortage of bush meat, NSMA has supported temporary closure of the Bathurst Caribou harvest, in order for the herd to recover in strength.

To facilitate the recovery of the herd, the NSMA would like to again emphasize that a collaborative platform to make long-term management decisions are critical, and we urge expedient establishment of the proposed Bathurst Caribou Collaborative Management Advisory Committee.