

SUBMISSION TO THE
NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD
FOR

Information:

Decision: X

Issue: Modification to existing Total Allowable Harvest levels for Baffin Bay Narwhal Stocks and Narwhal in Jones and Smith Sounds, Nunavut and Approval of the Narwhal Flexible Quota System

Background

In August 2013, Fisheries & Oceans Canada (DFO) conducted the first within season aerial survey of the six Canadian narwhal summer aggregations in the high Arctic: Somerset Island stock, Admiralty Inlet stock, Eclipse Sound stock, East Baffin Island stock in the Baffin Bay population; and the Jones and Smith Sounds stocks near Grise Fiord (Figure 1). DFO Science used the results of this survey to estimate the abundance of narwhal and calculate Total Allowable Landed Catch (TALC) recommendations for each of these stocks (Table 1). In general, the 2013 abundance estimate for the Canadian high Arctic narwhal is higher than previous estimates with the exception of the Eclipse Sound stock, which saw a decrease of almost half from the previous 2004 survey (Tab 1- Abundance estimates of narwhal stocks in the Canadian High Arctic in 2013).

Science advice was also received on the sustainability of the “*flexible quota system*” that has been used on an interim basis since 2013. This flexible quota system allows for the carry-over of unused TAH to be used in the subsequent hunting season.

The science advice indicates that the flexible TAH system and tag transfer policy currently being used for narwhal is sustainable, as long as the total hunting mortality over the five-year period does not exceed five times the annual Potential Biological Removal (PBR) level (Tab 2- Sustainability of a Flexible System of Total Allowable Annual Catches of Narwhals).

Narwhal are designated as Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). They are also listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES) and a non-detriment finding (NDF) from the DFO Scientific Authority is required to obtain a CITES Export/Re-export permit for international trade of narwhal products from Canada. There is currently a standing positive NDF for all narwhal stocks in Canada.

Based on the lower 2013 abundance estimate for the Eclipse Sound narwhal stock, the existing Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 236 would need to be reduced to 134, in line with the new TALC advice, for the DFO Scientific Authority to issue a positive NDF finding for this stock and therefore maintain the ability to internationally export narwhal products harvested from the Eclipse Sound stock.

Community consultations on the Science advice for narwhal management

DFO conducted consultations with potentially affected Inuit on management options to implement the new science advice and the flexible quota system. The consultation process had two components: (1) in-person consultations with the communities of Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, Clyde River and Qikiqtarjuaq April 18-22, 2016; and (2) written consultations with the remaining communities that harvest from the Baffin Bay, Jones and Smith Sounds narwhal stocks, as well as the Kitikmeot and Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Boards.

DFO was seeking input on:

1. Proposed TAH modifications, specifically, *to modify the existing TAHs for the Baffin Bay and Jones and Smith Sounds narwhal Management Units based on the 2013 survey results*; and
2. The formal implementation of the “narwhal flexible quota system” and tag transfer policy phase II (Tabs 2 and 3).

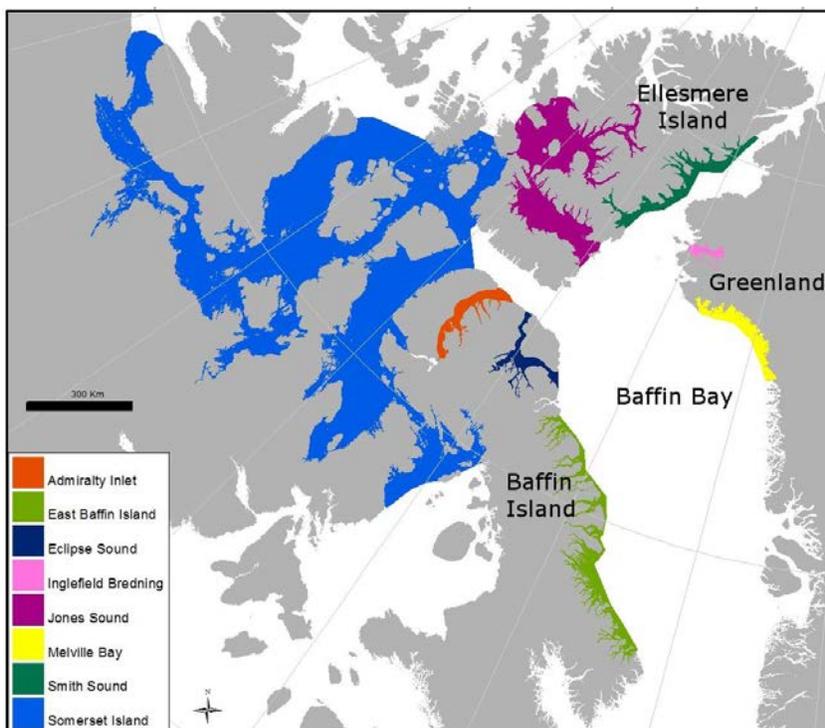


Figure 1. Map of High Arctic narwhal summer aggregations (source: NAMMCO/SC/21-JCNB/SWG/14-05).

Table 1. New Total Allowable Landed Catch (TALC) science recommendations for narwhal stocks based on the 2013 aerial survey results (CSAS SAR June 2015) in comparison to the current Total Allowable Harvests (TAH).

Narwhal Stock	Management Unit	Current TAH*	New TALC (TAH) Recommendations
Somerset Island	SI	532	658
Admiralty Inlet	AI	233	389
Eclipse Sound	ES	236	134
East Baffin Island	EBI	122	206
Unassigned	Jones Sound	50**	76
Unassigned	Smith Sound		77

* established by the NWMB in 2013 and approved by the Minister of DFO

** while there is no TALC, the Minister did approve a Total Allowable Harvest (quota) of 50 for both areas combined.

In-Person Consultation Results (included a meeting with the HTO and a public meeting in each community)

Modification of the TAH:

- The communities of Arctic Bay, Clyde River and Qikiqtarjuaq appeared to be in general support of the proposed TAH modifications for Admiralty Inlet and East Baffin Island narwhal stocks.
- The community of Pond Inlet did not support the recommended TAH modification for the Eclipse Sound stock.
 - The HTO suggested that the decrease in the abundance estimate for Eclipse Sound was a result of ship traffic, whales moving all over the place (including to Western Nunavut communities), and difficulty in counting submerged whales.
 - The community stated that the numbers of narwhal vary from year to year.
 - The HTO explained that there was a lot of movement by narwhal between Admiralty Inlet and Eclipse Sound and suggested that if the count had been done at a different time of year it is possible that there would have been a decrease in Admiralty Inlet and an increase in Eclipse Sound abundance estimates.
 - The HTO wanted to maintain the status quo (i.e. the TAH that was established in 2013) for a period of five years.

Implementation of the Narwhal Flexible Quota System:

- There were no concerns raised about implementation of the flex quota system from the communities of Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet;
- There appeared to be support for implementation of the flex quota system from the communities of Clyde River and Qikiqtarjuaq.

Implementation of Tag Transfer Policy Phase II:

- There were no concerns raised about implementation of tag transfer phase II from the communities of Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet;
- There appeared to be support for implementation of tag transfer policy phase II from the communities of Clyde River and Qikiqtarjuaq subject to support from QWB and DFO.

CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)

- *Arctic Bay, Clyde River, and Qikiqtarjuaq:* There were no concerns raised about these points during both the community and HTO meetings.
- *Pond Inlet:* The HTO said that Inuit are less concerned about selling narwhal products internationally and more interested in harvesting for food.

A full report on the consultation results can be found in TAB 4.

Written Consultation Results

DFO invited other affected HTO and community members to participate in the written consultation process by providing comments or concerns on the proposed TAH modifications and implementation of the flex quota system, by May 31, 2016 (Tab 5). The communities participating in the written consultations harvest from narwhal stocks where DFO is recommending an increase in the TALC/TAH.

DFO will provide additional information on the written consultation results at the NWMB's June 2016 meeting

Proposed changes to the current narwhal management regime

Changes to the current narwhal management regime are being proposed for the conservation of narwhal stocks and populations and to ensure that Inuit harvesting is restricted only to the extent necessary to achieve conservation purposes. This will provide for sustainable harvesting activities and the retention of associated economic opportunities. In addition, the formal implementation of the flex quota and tag transfer system will provide harvesters, HTOs and RWOs increased flexibility in harvest allocations and utilization.

Recommendations:

DFO is requesting approval from the NWMB on the following:

- Modify the existing TAHs for the Baffin Bay and Jones and Smith Sounds narwhal Management Units based on the 2013 survey results identified in Table 1 (NLCA s 5.2.33(d)).
- Formally approve the Narwhal Flexible Quota System and Tag Transfer Policy Phase II (NLCA s.5.2.33(k)).

The goal is to have a final decision approved by the DFO Minister and ready for implementation for the 2017 harvest season

TAB 1 – DFO Science Advice- Abundance estimates of narwhal stocks in the Canadian High Arctic in 2013.

TAB 2 – DFO Science Advice- Sustainability of a Flexible System of Total Allowable Annual Catches of Narwhals.

TAB 3 – Narwhal flexible quota system

TAB 4- Consultation Results – “What We Heard” Document

TAB 5- Written Consultation Letter

Submitted by:

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Date: May 13, 2016