

Tammaqtainahuarniriit anngutighat atuqhugit Inuit qaujimajatuqangillu ilihmaniillu ilitquhiannin  
Conserving wildlife through the application of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and scientific knowledge

26, 2016

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Honourable Hunter Tootoo  
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard  
200 Kent Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0E6

**Re: Interim decision concerning entrapped belugas in the Belcher Islands**

On January 15<sup>th</sup> 2016, your department notified the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB or Board) that a group of beluga whales were trapped in a polynya in the Belcher Islands near the community of Sanikiluaq, Nunavut. Your department also indicated that a variation order in place for the Belcher Islands with a closed season from December 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2016 (*Central and Arctic Region Variation Order NU-2015/2016 MM-008*) was preventing harvesters in Sanikiluaq from harvesting these trapped whales legally. On January 21<sup>st</sup> 2016 your department's Regional Director General for the Central and Arctic Region, acting as your delegated agent as per Section 5.3.24 of the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*, made the interim decision to issue a new variation order varying the end of the close time in the Belcher Islands from March 31<sup>st</sup> to January 19<sup>th</sup> 2016.

As per Section 5.3.24 of the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*, the NWMB met via teleconference on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016 to conduct a full review of this interim decision. The Board considered the concerns raised by the Sanikiluaq Hunters and Trappers Organization regarding the safety of harvesters around the polynya as tides become stronger, as well as the inability of the whales to escape from the polynya and low availability of food for the whales in this area. The NWMB agreed that the circumstances of this entrapment were unusual and urgent, warranting an interim decision, and made the following decision:

*RESOLVED that, pursuant to Section 5.3.24 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the NWMB – having carefully reviewed the January 21<sup>st</sup> 2016 Section 5.3.24 interim decision by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to modify the closed season for belugas in the Belcher Islands (Central and Arctic Region Variation Order NU-2015/2016 MM-008) – conclude that the decision was reasonable in the circumstances.*

The NWMB appreciates the effective communication between your department and co-management partners in dealing with urgent matters such as this. The Board looks forward to continued collaboration on developing an efficient process for responding to whale entrapments. Should you or your officials have any questions or concerns regarding the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact the NWMB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jason Akearok". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jason" and the last name "Akearok" clearly distinguishable.

Jason Akearok  
Executive Director  
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board

c.c. Larry Dow, Director, Northern Operations, Fisheries and Oceans Canada; and  
David Burden, Regional Director General, Central and Arctic Region, Fisheries and  
Oceans Canada.