

Nunavut wildlife board to hold bowhead whale hearing in February

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The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board has tentatively scheduled a public meeting for February, to hear Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.'s request to boost the number of bowhead whales Inuit can hunt next summer.

At the wildlife board's regular meeting this week in Iqaluit, the Nunavut Inuit organization pushed the board to decide quickly on whether to raise the bowhead whale hunting quota, also known as the total allowable harvest, for 2009.

The quota this summer was raised from one to two bowhead whales, but Nunavut Tunngavik wildlife consultant Glen Williams said the bowhead population is healthy enough for three whales to be hunted next year.

"NTI, on behalf of Inuit, are anticipating that we should be able to do three bowhead hunts next summer," Williams told the board.

If Nunavut Inuit take three whales next year, and Inuit in Greenland and the Nunavik region of northern Quebec take one whale each, a total of five whales would be hunted, Williams said.

That would fall well within estimates by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which has said the eastern Arctic bowhead population could sustain a hunt of as many as 10 whales.

"The information that DFO has presented to the board, is the PBR — the potential biological removal — for this population of bowheads is 10," Williams said.

Nunavut Wildlife Management Board member Robert Moshenko said it will work towards holding a public hearing on Feb. 10 to discuss the total allowable harvest for bowhead whales.

After the wildlife board makes a recommendation on the matter, the federal minister of fisheries and oceans would have up to 60 days to decide whether to accept the board's recommendation.

Williams said NTI wants a decision before the summer, as it wants the 2009 bowhead hunts to take place in July or August.

After that, Williams said the organization wants a quota of three bowheads every year until 2012, when NTI would ask the wildlife board to consider lifting the total allowable harvest restriction altogether.