

Socio-economic analysis regarding possible listing of two beluga populations under the *Species at Risk Act*

Cumberland Sound population

Historic over-exploitation by commercial whaling was the major cause of the decline of this beluga whale population. Recent research and local knowledge suggest the population is recovering and that the current subsistence hunt is sustainable given current quota levels. Nevertheless listing of this population under the *Special at Risk Act* would ensure the ongoing recovery of the population and provide support to current recovery and hunt management efforts, including approval and implementation of the Cumberland Sound Beluga Recovery Strategy and the Cumberland Sound Beluga Fishery Management Plan.

Listing the Cumberland Sound population of beluga whale as Threatened under the *SARA* would require the development of a recovery strategy and one or more action plans. A recovery strategy has mostly been drafted. Costs associated with implementing it and developing an action plan(s) are thought to be in the range of \$200,000 to \$250,000. Other costs to the federal government would primarily involve monitoring and compliance with regulations, harvest quotas and hunting by-laws.

The Inuit of Cumberland Sound have long depended on the hunt of belugas for their survival and beluga hunting has contributed to their cultural traditions. Socio-economic impacts of listing this beluga population would depend on whether automatic prohibitions take effect and, if so, the extent to which beluga subsistence harvesting needs to be reduced or eliminated. Reduction in the availability of beluga meat and *maktaq* for country food would require protein replacement sources. Locally available country food sources are understood to be relatively scarce in the Pangnirtung area and other sources of country food or "southern" foods would be to be costly due to very high transportation costs. However, because the draft recovery strategy will likely maintain harvest quotas at current levels, the socio-economic impacts of listing may be negligible.

In the long-term, there are potential socio-economic benefits to be gained from listing. Given the high costs of alternate food sources to beluga, success of recovery actions and efforts to maintain both the current quota or and potential future harvest increases may provide for future net economic gains. This will be important in Nunavut, particularly given current human birth and population growth rates.

Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population

The results of the 1996 survey and recent local knowledge suggest this beluga whale population is not under any serious threats and may be near its carrying capacity. Current harvest levels in Canadian waters are below the maximum sustainable yield for the population. The Greenland component of the population is now being managed under quotas.

Listing the Eastern High Arctic-Baffin Bay population of beluga whales as Special Concern under the *Species at Risk Act* would produce no automatic prohibitions and limited socio-economic impacts. A management plan would be prepared with input from the local Hunters and Trappers Committees and other relevant organizations. Engagement may be difficult as they do not agree with the COSEWIC assessment. Costs associated with developing and implementing a management plan are thought to be in the range of \$100,000. Other costs to the federal government would primarily involve a marginal increase in monitoring and compliance of regulations.

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