

SUBMISSION TO THE NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information: X

Decision:

Issue: Information regarding plans for consultation and decision-making regarding the possible addition of the Ringed Seal to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk on the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

Background:

As per 3.5 of the Harmonized Listing Process, the Department of Fisheries & Oceans (DFO) is informing the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessment results and a DFO intent to consult on the Ringed Seal (*Pusa hispida*) (Figure 1).

Ringed Seal

This small seal is broadly distributed throughout the Arctic and needs sea ice to thrive. It is the most abundant marine mammal in the Canadian Arctic. It is an important species for Inuit and is the primary prey of Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*). Its population levels and trends are uncertain, although the total population is about 2 million individuals. Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge from local communities across the species' range suggests that its population status varies regionally, but is generally considered stable. Reductions in the area and duration of sea ice due to climate warming in the Canadian Arctic, with consequent reductions in suitable pupping habitat due to loss of stable ice and a lower spring snow depth, are the primary threats to this species. The Canadian population is predicted to decline over the next three generations, and may become Threatened due to extensive and ongoing changes in sea ice and snow cover in a rapidly-warming Arctic.

The Ringed Seal was considered by COSEWIC in November 2019 and designated as Special Concern.

Significance

Ringed Seal are one of the smallest pinnipeds, with average adults being 1.5 m long and weighing 70 kg—males being slightly larger than females. Ringed Seal is important both economically and culturally to northern peoples. Ringed Seal is the primary prey for the Polar Bear, but is also preyed upon by Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*), Walruses (*Odobenus rosmarus*), and Greenland Sharks (*Somniosus microcephalus*). The Arctic Fox (*Vulpes lagopus*) can also be important predators on pups, particularly when snow cover is very low.



Figure 1: Photo of the Ringed Seal (*Pusa hispida*) (from COSEWIC 2019).

Distribution

Ringed Seal has a circumpolar distribution over Arctic and subarctic waters, relying on sea ice as habitat. Their Canadian distribution ranges from Yukon in the west to southern Labrador in the east, with occasional sightings of vagrants south of the seasonal ice zone in both Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Requirements for Consultation and Approval

Article 5.2.34 (f) of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement states that the NWMB shall, at its discretion, approve the designation of rare, threatened or endangered species. As well, Section 27 (2) (c) of the SARA requires that before making a recommendation as to whether or not to add a species at risk to Schedule 1, the Minister must consult the Board for species found in an area in respect of which the Board is authorized by a land claims agreement to perform its functions.

Due to their importance in Nunavut and the western Arctic as well as people in other areas of Canada, DFO anticipates that this will be a prolonged consultation process.

Consultation and Approval:

DFO is planning to consult with all Hunters and Trappers Organizations in Nunavut on Ringed Seal, probably commencing this fall, to ensure that any listing decision is made in full consideration of the views of Inuit. Comments received will be used by the Minister to decide whether to recommend legal listing of the Ringed Seal. A consultation summary will be provided to the NWMB, probably in the fall of 2022.

Approval

After public consultations have been completed, DFO will provide the Board with a summary of the community consultations for the Ringed Seal. At a later date we will inform the Board what the Minister plans to recommend to the Governor-in-Council

with regards to listing. At that time DFO will ask the Board whether or not it wishes to express an opinion on listing.

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Date:

January 12, 2021

Appendices

Appendix 1 - COSEWIC Executive Summary for Ringed Seal