Response Statement - Northern Bottlenose Whale, Davis Strait-Baffin Bay-Labrador Sea population

December 8, 2011

Common Name: Northern Bottlenose Whale, Davis Strait-Baffin Bay-Labrador Sea population
Scientific Name: *Hyperoodon ampullatus*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Special Concern

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake consultations with the governments of Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, the Torngat Joint Fisheries Board and the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Northern Bottlenose Whale, Davis Strait-Baffin Bay-Labrador Sea population, should be added to the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act* as Special Concern. The Minister of the Environment will forward the COSEWIC assessment of the Northern Bottlenose Whale, Davis Strait-Baffin Bay-Labrador Sea population, to the Governor in Council upon completion of consultations.

Once a species has been assessed by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. For more information on this process, please view The Species Listing Process Under SARA.

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: The population is of Special Concern for the following reasons: (1) numbers were likely reduced by whaling in the late 1960s and early 1970s when 818 whales were taken; (2) trends in population size since then are uncertain but survey sighting rates have been low; and (3) threats from fishery interactions are documented and ongoing. There is no abundance estimate. Entanglement in fishing gear is the primary known threat but noise and contaminants are also of concern. The whales in the Baffin Bay-Davis Strait-Labrador Sea region have been genetically linked to the population off Iceland so rescue is possible.

Occurrence: Atlantic Ocean

Competent Minister(s):
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency

Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:
Quebec
Newfoundland and Labrador
Nunavut

Applicable federal legislation: Protected under the federal *Marine Mammal Regulations* under the *Fisheries Act*. Habitat protected under section 35 of the *Fisheries Act*.

Conservation activities underway: In Canada, northern bottlenose whales are managed under the *Marine Mammal Regulations* of the *Fisheries Act*, which prohibit hunting without a license except as prescribed under the Regulations. There is currently no commercial or food, social, or ceremonial hunting for northern bottlenose whales. Voluntary whale watching guidelines exist in many jurisdictions and the Government of Canada is in the final stages of enacting new national regulations on marine mammal watching. The Newfoundland and Labrador Region Science Branch of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) maintains a photo identification catalogue for northern bottlenose whales. Many of the source images come from Fisheries Observers which the Department has equipped with digital cameras to gather imagery for marine mammals and other species associated with fishing operations. The Marine Mammal Section (DFO) is working with Transport Canada, and Conservation and Protection (DFO) to collect offshore whale imagery from their patrol aircraft. It is unclear if whales found on the Grand Banks are part of the Davis Strait or Scotian Shelf populations. Therefore, the Marine Mammal Section has collected tissue samples from northern bottlenose whales that have stranded in Newfoundland and Labrador in order to assess stock relationships. Studies on the distribution, fishery interactions, and stock structure will continue on an opportunistic basis. In the Central and Arctic Region, DFO is conducting research in collaboration with the Greenland Climate Research Centre, Greenland Institute of Natural Resources to understand foraging behaviour of northern bottlenose whales. Acoustic tagging is planned for Greenland in 2012 to assess diving behaviour. Biopsy samples will be taken from live animals approaching the research vessel and fatty acid and stable isotope signals will be compared with commercially caught squid to assess diet.