

Response Statement - Bowhead Whale, Eastern Canada-West Greenland population

November 25, 2009

Common Name: Bowhead Whale, Eastern Canada-West Greenland population

Scientific Name: *Balaena mysticetus*

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 and the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board, Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Bowhead Whale, Eastern Canada-West Greenland 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 Bowhead Whale, Eastern Canada-West Greenland 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 was severely depleted by commercial whaling, starting in the 1500s and continuing until about 1910. Since the early 1900s, it has been subject only to sporadic hunting by Inuit in Canada and Greenland. In the absence of commercial whaling, the population is believed to have been increasing for decades and is likely still increasing. This increase is supported by evidence from both Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) and science. Current total abundance is estimated at around 6000. In spite of the increase, the population is not yet clearly secure because of its life history (e.g. long generation time, very low natural growth rate). Additionally, there is uncertainty about how bowheads will respond to the rapid changes in their habitat due to climate change and increasing human activities such as shipping and oil exploration in high latitudes. Such habitat changes have already begun to occur and will intensify over the next 100 years. In view of the species' life history, it is important that hunting continue to be monitored and managed to ensure against over-harvest.

Occurrence: Arctic 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:

Conservation activities underway: To understand bowhead whale critical life-history processes, annual photoidentification of females and calves is being conducted in the traditional Foxe Basin nursery area. Bowhead whale habitat is being assessed from a foraging perspective using satellite telemetry results and chemical signals. For the former method, ice habitat, ocean colour, bathymetry, and landscape parameters are being used to understand bowhead whale habitat selection patterns. For the latter, bowhead biopsy samples from various years and seasons collected around Nunavut waters are being compared with zooplankton chemical signals (stable isotopes of nitrogen, carbon, and sulfur and fatty acids) to match seasonal foraging patterns.