

**SUBMISSION TO THE  
NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD  
FOR**

**Information:** X

**Decision:**

**Issue:** Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ), knowledge, and perspectives on M'Clintock Channel and Gulf of Boothia Polar Bears

**Background:**

The Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB) is providing a summary to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) on IQ and community knowledge and perspectives on M'Clintock Channel (MC) and Gulf of Boothia (GB) polar bears. This information is being presented due to the lack of IQ on these populations shared with NWMB. This information is being presented as contextual information for consideration in anticipated and future polar bear management issues. It is possible other Inuit communities across Nunavut may share the same concerns.

In 2020, the Government of Nunavut Department of Environment (GN DOE) contracted Trailmark Systems Inc. to conduct an IQ study of MC and GB polar bears with communities harvesting from those populations. This project involved:

- The co-development of a work plan and interview guide with GN DOE, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, Kugaaruk, Igloolik, Hall Beach, and Nauyas Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs)
- HTO recruitment of 3 to 5 community members in each community to be interviewed
- Interviews over telephone and Zoom video conferencing (due to COVID-19 travel restrictions) from 11 May to 10 August 2020
- An analysis of interview transcripts using a grounded theory (inductive) approach, where information is categorized and analysed without any pre-existing theory
- Remote validation of interview summaries for each community by each HTO

This project was reviewed and finalized by GN DOE in February 2021; GN DOE did not interpret or make changes to interview results. The resulting two (MC and GB) reports were distributed to the communities by email. The reports were also shared with NWMB staff but the information contained within them was never presented to NWMB.

The information in the two reports include important information from community members and their HTOs. This information has been reviewed by KRWB and we list the themes that are relevant to our region below.

Polar bear hunting

- Ranging experiences with polar bear hunting and encounters among hunters
- Polar bear behaviour and differences among sex and age groups: bears can be persistent, and learn from and respond to humans
- Polar bear areas (e.g., where they feed, den, and/or can be harvested)

- Traditional hunting practices and, hence, why polar bear IQ is important, how it is learned, and how it evolves
- Ranging familiarity with history of polar bear management and harvesting regulations among hunters
- Harvest restrictions affecting land use and access to polar bear hunting experience and knowledge
- Community-specific tag allocation practices
- Changes in polar bear use over time (e.g, effects of less access to hunting depreciating value of hides on hunters)

#### Population changes

- Increasing numbers of both MC and GB bears and indicators of this change: frequent encounters, hunting success, distinguishing tracks or bears during mating season, more young bears, more mothers with cubs, more cubs per female, opportunities for harvest selection when hunting
- Serious concerns about bear aggression and safety due to higher densities of them
- Bears responding differently to humans today compared to the past

#### Concerns about bear research

- Lack of trust in bear management and research
- Ongoing criticism of past mark-recapture methods (bear handling), despite new research methods
- Criticisms of scientific research and survey areas
- Failure of scientific models to incorporate bear safety and Inuit livelihood
- Disagreement with perceptions of climate change affecting population persistence; bears are adaptable

#### Bear management

- Movement of polar bears between MC and GB, although some differences in body fat and behaviour were described
- Perceptions of harvest regulations being imposed on versus agreed upon by Inuit
- Lack of community support for harvest restrictions, although regulations are always followed
- Acknowledgement that regulations can prevent overharvesting
- Inadequate inclusion of elders' concerns in polar bear management
- Precautionary approaches to bear management conflicting with Inuit needs
- The need for more tags to accommodate bear safety and harvesting needs
- Disturbances to polar bears (e.g., transportation vehicles and interacting with without harvesting them) that make them more aggressive

#### **Consultation:**

The idea for this information to be shared with NWMB was first proposed by Pamela Wong during KRWB's Annual General Meeting in Kugluktuk from 19–21 October 2021. During that time, the Board agreed that they would follow-up on this topic over teleconference. During a teleconference meeting on 27 October 2021, KRWB decided to submit this summary as

information for consideration by the NWMB. This memo was reviewed and validated by the Executives on 3 November 2021.

**Recommendation:**

Consideration of IQ and Inuit perspectives when interpreting narratives about polar bears, research data on polar bears, and bear management; inclusion of social, cultural, and economic impacts to Inuit in bear management and population assessments.

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