



Tammaqtailinahuarnirit anngutighat atuqhugit Inuit qaujimajatuqangillu ilihimaniillu ilitquhiannin
Conserving wildlife through the application of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and scientific knowledge



Hon. Joe Savikataaq
Minister of Environment,
Government of Nunavut

Re: NWMB Decision on the Government of Nunavut's Proposal to Establish a Total Allowable Harvest of 74 polar bears for the Gulf of Boothia subpopulation

At the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board's (NWMB or Board) Regular Meeting (RM001-2021) on March 10, 2021, your department presented a proposal requesting that the Board establish a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 74 polar bears for the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation, thereby maintaining the current harvest limit. During the Board's In-Camera Meeting (IC001-2021), on March 11, 2021, the Board considered your department's proposal, along with (1) a report of the 2015–2017 Government of Nunavut study to estimate the Gulf of Boothia subpopulation abundance, (2) an account of Government of Nunavut in-person consultations with Hunters and Trappers Organizations in Gjoa Haven, Sanirajak, Igloodik, Kugaaruk, Naujaat, and Taloyoak, (3) an Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit study on Gulf of Boothia polar bears commissioned by the Government of Nunavut, and (4) oral submissions by co-management partners at the Regular Meeting. The Board made the following decision:

RESOLVED that the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board defers its decision on the Total Allowable Harvest for the Gulf of Boothia polar bear subpopulation pending the outcome of ongoing consultations on the polar bear Harvest Administration and Credit Calculation System (HACCS), which is anticipated to come to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board for review and approval soon.

In reaching its decision, the Board considered the following arguments and evidence:

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Iglolik (11), Sanirajak (4), Kugaaruk (24), Talojoak (25), Gjoa Haven (5) and Naujaat (5). The Board considered evidence provided by the Government of Nunavut concerning the harvesting of polar bears from the Gulf of Boothia between 2009–2019. These records show that the average harvest rate since 2019 remains below the harvest limit—at 63 bears per year over the past five years. Board members asked the Government of Nunavut why the full TAH is not being harvested. The Board heard that under the 2:1 harvest sex ratio, some communities stopped harvesting once female tags were used up to prevent over-penalization under the Flexible Quota System (the 2:1 Harvest sex ratio was changed in 2019). The Board also heard that rough ice conditions also played a role by restricting access to "prime harvesting locations."

As a result of harvesting below the Total Allowable Harvest for ten years, communities harvesting from the Gulf of Boothia subpopulation have accumulated 119 male and 22 female credits as of the end of the 2019–2020 harvest season. The Government of Nunavut explained that credits would be zeroed if the NWMB and Minister set a new TAH because the new population estimate and recommended TAH considers all bears in the subpopulation.

At the NWMB Regular Meeting, the Board heard and considered oral arguments from its co-management partners. Environment and Climate Change Canada expressed that the current quota of 74 was based on modelling that assumed a harvest sex ratio of two males for every one female. Therefore, the proposed recommendation to maintain the TAH to be harvested at a sex ratio of one male for every one female could lead to long-term population declines, as "adult females are the most important contributors to population growth." Environment and Climate Change Canada recommended that a quantitative harvest risk assessment be conducted in advance of a TAH decision to inform management objectives and the proposed TAH.

The Board heard from the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board, who stated that the Government of Nunavut consultations with affected communities were incomplete or insufficient because credit reset was not raised and discussed at the consultation meetings. The Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board further presented a motion, requesting the Board "delay a new decision on the TAH for Gulf of Boothia polar bears until after the communities, and Regional Wildlife Organizations have been fully informed of the effects on their credits, and have time to reply to the NWMB on this issue." In response to the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board's position and motion to adjourn, the Government of Nunavut stated that credit reset following a new TAH is in line with the Interim Flexible Quota System and



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Agreement Article 5 decision-making process. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please do not hesitate to contact the NWMB.

Sincerely,

Daniel Shewchuk
Chairperson
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board

cc: Drikus Gissing, Government of Nunavut.

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