

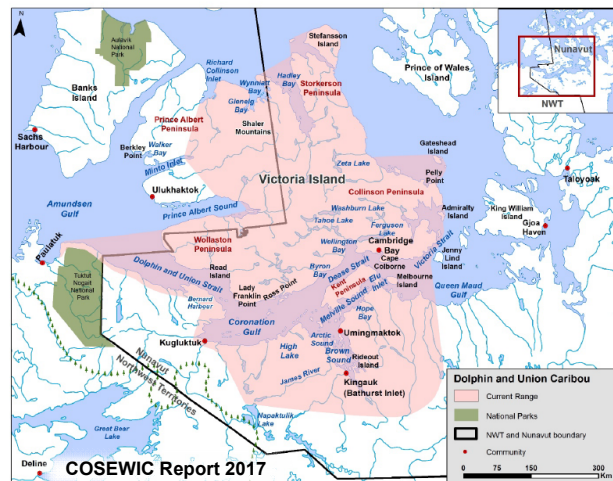


## Submission to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board

For

Information: **Decision: X**

**Issue:** Request for decision on the proposed change in status of Dolphin and Union Caribou from Special Concern to Endangered under the federal *Species at Risk Act*



## Introduction

- We have been consulting on this status change for 3 years.
- All partners recognized that this herd benefits from conservation/recovery actions, but there were many concerns with the COSEWIC assessment.
- We have worked with Inuvialuit and Inuit organizations to address various concerns, including making an addendum to the 2017 COSEWIC report that includes TK/IQ.
- There is still no support amongst Inuit organizations for this status change, principally because of the lack of engagement in the assessment process.

## Background

### Distribution

- The range of Dolphin and Union Caribou spans two jurisdictions: Northwest Territories and Nunavut. In Nunavut, Dolphin and Union Caribou are found in the Kitikmeot region.

## Assessments and Listings

- In 2004, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessed Dolphin and Union Caribou as Special Concern.
- In 2011, Dolphin and Union Caribou was listed as Special Concern under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).
- In 2013, the Northwest Territories Species at Risk Committee (NWT SARC) assessed Dolphin and Union Caribou as Special Concern (the species was listed in NWT as Special Concern in 2015).
- In 2017, COSEWIC reassessed Dolphin and Union caribou as Endangered because of the steep population decline.

## Population decline

- Three (3) surveys (1997, 2007 and 2015) were considered in the 2017 COSEWIC report and suggested an overall decline of 50% between 1997 and 2015.
- Since the 2017 COSEWIC assessment, two additional surveys were conducted by the Government of Nunavut in 2018 and 2020 (Figure 1). The population estimate for these two surveys are approximately 4,000 caribou, which indicates an overall decline of 78% between 2015 and 2018.

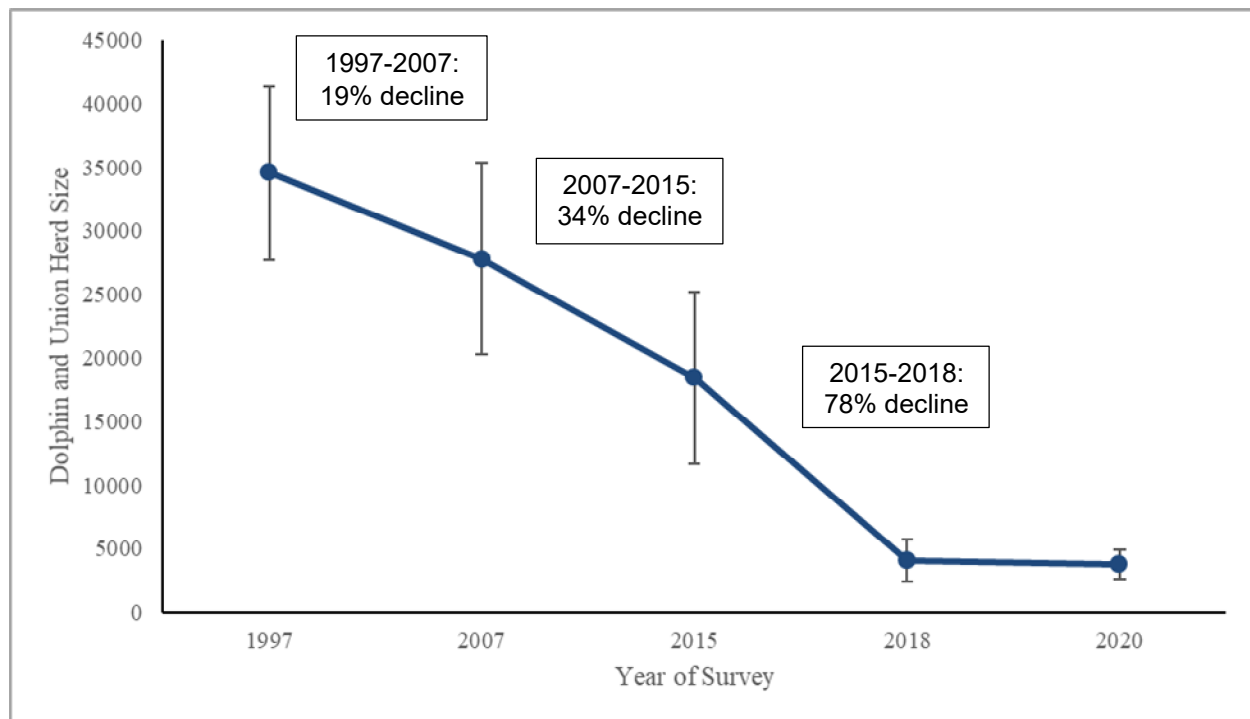


Figure 1. Population estimates with 95% confidence intervals error bars for Dolphin and Union Caribou between 1997 and 2020 (modified from Government of Nunavut). The population was 34,558 in 1997, fell to 27,787 in 2007, fell further to 18,413 in 2015, and continued to decline to 4,105 in 2018. In 2020 the population was 3,815 (including Victoria Island and the mainland).

## Threats

- According to the COSEWIC report (2017), the population is experiencing multiple threats, and future decline is predicted based on ongoing threats.
- Threats to sea ice: The reduced connectivity of sea ice due to ice-breaker supported shipping and irregularity in sea ice conditions due to climate change are disrupting migration. Drowning and delayed migration are already being observed.
- Predation from wolves and Grizzly Bears, as well as interactions with muskox, were additional concerns.
- In 2017, COSEWIC identified harvesting as a concern because of the absence of (1) Total Allowable Harvest (TAH – later established in 2020 in Nunavut), and (2) mandatory harvest reporting. According to COSEWIC, the absence of harvest information becomes a serious threat if a population is declining because the effects of harvest impacts to a population are known to increase during a decline.
- The spread of insect pests and pathogens, as well as terrestrial habitat changes/severe weather events associated with climate change, were also identified threats.

This was the main information COSEWIC used to assess Dolphin & Union Caribou as Endangered.

When Dolphin & Union Caribou were listed as Special Concern in 2011, a Management Plan was developed. One element that emerged from that plan is the User-to-User working group which foster a collaboration between communities of Nunavut and NWT. If this herd gets up-listed to Endangered, a Recovery Strategy will have to be developed, and this working group will be key in this process.

## Joint National Management Plan

- As required under SARA for species listed as Special Concern, a national Management Plan was developed between 2015 and 2018.
- The management plan was prepared jointly by the Government of Nunavut (GN) and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), in cooperation with the Government of Canada and co-management partners. Development of the management plan was done in close collaboration with HTOs and HTC's respecting co-management processes.

## Implications of the change in status

- If Dolphin and Union Caribou status under the federal *Species at Risk Act* is changed from Special Concern to Endangered, a recovery strategy will be developed. Building from the existing management plan, the recovery strategy would identify:
  - Population and distribution objectives,
  - Recovery actions needed to stop or reverse the decline of the population,
  - Critical habitat necessary for the survival or recovery of Dolphin and Union Caribou in order to support the population and distribution objectives, and
  - Activities likely to destroy the critical habitat.
- Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) would work collaboratively with all management partners in NU and NWT to identify those key elements.

- If Dolphin and Union Caribou status under the *Species at Risk Act* changed to Endangered, SARA's automatic prohibitions would not apply to Inuit exercising harvesting rights under the *Nunavut Agreement*. Harvest management decisions would continue to be made according to the processes established by Article 5 of the *Nunavut Agreement*, and existing wildlife management bodies and processes remain in place (as per the current TAH).
- If Dolphin and Union Caribou status under the *Species at Risk Act* changed to Endangered, communities would have more resources available to them to support conservation activities (e.g. monitoring programs, Inuit knowledge collection) through federal funding programs such as the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk.

#### Consultation on the proposed uplisting

- In April 2019, both the Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs) and the public were consulted in-person in Kugluktuk, Cambridge Bay, Ulukhaktok and Paulatuk. The Bathurst Inlet HTO and Bay Chimo HTO were sent the consultation package and invited to the meetings in Cambridge Bay (see Appendix A and B).
- The Kitikmeot regional biologist with the Government of Nunavut-Department of Environment and one staff with Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) participated to the community tour in Nunavut. One Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KitIA) staff participated to the public meeting in Cambridge Bay.
- Detailed meeting notes were produced, as well as a table summarizing the comments and concerns expressed by communities (see Appendix C). Main concerns expressed by communities in April 2019 included (see Appendix C for more details):
  - Survey methodology used by the Government of Nunavut that raised concerns about the validity of the population estimates;
  - Lack of TK/IQ in the COSEWIC assessment report, and lack of engagement efforts by COSEWIC during the assessment process;
  - Pro-active measures taken by HTC/HTOs to manage the herd and support their recovery were not considered;
  - Some information was incomplete: Dolphin & Union caribou undergo population cycles and their distribution is changing, more research is needed to better understand those patterns.
- In April 2019, all communities did not support the proposed status change.
- In Nunavut, HTOs and KRWB were still opposed to the status change in 2022. In the Northwest Territories, all organizations supported the status change in 2021/2022.

### Actions taken to address concerns expressed by communities

- Between April and June 2021, many virtual meetings were held with partners of Nunavut and NWT (see appendix B) to discuss the 2019 consultations and consider next steps to address their concerns. Two main options came out of these meetings:
  1. Request a “refer back to COSEWIC” and submit a new assessment collaboratively developed by all partners. This would have pushed the next COSEWIC assessment to after 2033 (instead of 2027), which was a concern for some partners. COSEWIC could have refused the “refer back”.
  2. Create an addendum to articulate concerns and share information for future assessments. This document would be submitted to COSEWIC and potentially posted on the registry to supplement the 2017 COSEWIC assessment.
- Partners preferred to develop an addendum to the 2017 COSEWIC report:
  - Monthly meetings were held with all users to develop the document in a collaborative way (see appendix B). This process was initiated by ECCC but is now led by KRWB and WMAC-NWT, with ECCC’s support.
  - The addendum includes new information available since the assessment in 2017: new population surveys (2018 and 2020), icebreaking agreement between the Cambridge Bay HTO and Transport Canada (Pro-Active Vessel Management Initiative), pro-active measures taken by the HTC/HTOs, TAH in Nunavut, new TK/IQ reports. It also intends to rectify some information from the COSEWIC report that was misleading according to local knowledge.

### **Next Steps:**

We are requesting a decision from the NWMB on the proposed change in status of Dolphin and Union Caribou under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) as per the Nunavut Agreement s.5.2.34(f) and 5.3.16 - 5.3.23.