

SUBMISSION TO THE NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information: X

Decision:

Issue: Proposed listing of Dolphin and Union caribou under the Species at Risk Act

Background:

In 2017, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) conducted an assessment of Dolphin and Union (DU) caribou that resulted in a proposed uplisting from the Special Concern to Endangered status. It is the Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board's (KRWB) understanding that Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) is submitting the proposed uplisting of DU caribou to "Endangered" to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) for consideration.

As ECCC's proposal indicates, the COSEWIC assessment lacked Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), traditional knowledge (TK), local knowledge, and local community engagement. In attempting to address the concerns raised by communities about the lack of their inclusion and consultation, ECCC endeavored to develop an addendum to the assessment in collaboration with KRWB, Ekaluktutiak (Cambridge Bay) Hunters and Trappers Organization (EHTO), and Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association (KAA), as well as Hunters and Trappers Committees in the Northwest Territories. These communities reside, hunt, and work within the range of DU caribou. The addendum would contain their information and management initiatives that are essential to the understanding of the species' current situation. However, when IQ or TK is recorded—even with the intention to preserve or include it—there is a risk that it could be interpreted and used in a way that was not originally intended, expected or agreed upon by Inuit, especially if it is made available to the public. KRWB, EHTO, and KAA will continue to work on an addendum that avoids these risks and outlines considerations for community engagement in the Species at Risk Act (SARA) process.

Consultation:

This report was prepared after discussions with EHTO, KAA, and KRWB throughout ECCC's consultation process. This report was reviewed by KAA on 27 April 2022 and KRWB on 29 April 2022.

Recommendation:

Below we provide important information and management initiatives from KAA and EHTO when considering DU caribou.

Dolphin and Union caribou ecology

- Inuit hunters are knowledgeable of DU caribou and herd composition when they encounter them, based on their trails and physical characteristics
- DU caribou occur where vegetation is available and avoid predators and other animals that share the same habitat (e.g., muskox and snow geese). Caribou migrations reflect these patterns.
- DU caribou are known to migrate between Victoria Island and the mainland (Hanke et al. 2020; Wong et al. 2021), but not all caribou migrate across the sea ice. Some DU caribou have been encountered on the mainland or Victoria Island year-round. The Government of Nunavut recently attempted to collar these “resident caribou” but were unable to because of logistical limitations. Studies that take these DU caribou into account are needed.
- Community members continue to report the DU caribou range is broader than what recent aerial abundance surveys and/or collar data suggest; for example, community members have reported encounters near Sachs Harbour, Contwoyto Lake, and MacKay Lake (Northwest Territories). KRWB’s monitoring program and EHTO and KAA harvest sampling have the potential to record precise locations of DU caribou that are encountered beyond their expected range.
- Threats to DU caribou include hunting practices (whether subsistence, predator, and/or sport hunting), development and human disturbance, climate change, sea ice changes along migration routes, insects, and their combined effects (Hanke and Kutz 2020; Wong et al. 2021)

Dolphin and Union population changes

- IQ on DU caribou has been documented during interviews by the Government of Nunavut (in 2003; Hanke and Kutz 2020), Tomaselli et al. (2018), Hanke and Kutz (2020), and Wong et al. 2021. These interviews suggest DU populations are dynamic and experience cycles of increase and decrease over time. The 2018 COSEWIC assessment suggests we are currently in a period of low population abundance.
- Perceptions of fewer caribou in hunting areas could reflect changes in distribution, rather than overall population decline. Hanke and Kutz (2020) suggest caribou have shifted eastward and inland since the 1990s, due to sea ice freeze up delay and earlier sea ice formation in the east.
- Statements about caribou numbers that are made during IQ interviews reflect unique and individual encounters by hunters, depending on where and when they travel. Caribou encounters also depend on ability to access certain hunting areas. How numbers of caribou in hunting areas reflect population numbers (the entire DU range) is unknown and requires collaboration among HTOs and Hunters and Trappers Committees in the Northwest Territories.
- Researchers have suggested hunting range becomes smaller when population numbers are high, and expand when population is lower due to increase in search effort (Neis et al. 1999; Kendrick and Manseau 2008;

Hanke and Kutz 2020). However, search effort could also decrease when population is low because DU caribou in low numbers aggregate together. An increase in search effort is also expected when DU caribou are moving from one area to another.

Community-led management initiatives

- EHTO and KAA are proactive in DU caribou management. KAA stopped all sport hunting of caribou and commercial harvesting in 2007 and EHTO stopped all sport hunting of Dolphin and Union caribou in 2018.
- The Victoria Island Waterway Safety Committee (EHTO, Transport Canada, and Canada Coast Guard) enhances communication between vessels and community members using waterways through a Notice to Mariners. Vessels transiting the DU migration area are required to notify the hamlet and EHTO before they transit. The Notice also includes specific dates where transit is permitted, corresponding to DU migration timing.
- Wolves and grizzly bears have increased in abundance. In the past, predators were harvested to manage caribou populations. Today, predators require time and work to harvest and prepare meat, with fewer incentives to hunt them. Sport hunting and monetary incentives can support predator management. KAA participates in wolf monitoring programs in the Northwest Territories.
- Community members continue to highlight the need to preserve and pass on IQ and TK around harvest. Education opportunities between elders and youth are needed to share information about how to select the right animal, properly butcher and handle the harvested animal, and identify safe meat, as well as etiquette around meat sharing and harvest quantity (Hanke and Kutz 2020).
- EHTO will be initiating a project led by youth to interview elders about predators this year.
- Both KAA and EHTO actively participate in harvest monitoring of DU caribou health, in collaboration with University of Calgary and the Government of Nunavut. KAA and EHTO continue to document DU caribou harvests and encounters through NWMB's Community-Based Monitoring Network and KRWB's caribou monitoring program.

References

Hanke, A. and Kutz, S. 2020. Kitikmeot traditional knowledge studies on Dolphin and Union Caribou, 2003 and 2018–2020. Research. Update submitted to KAA, EHTO, Olokhaktomiut Hunters' and Trappers' Committee, KRWB, Wildlife Management Advisory Council, Government of Nunavut Department of Environment, Government of Northwest Territories Environment and Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

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Neis, B., Schneider, D.C., Felt, L., Haedrich, R.L., Fischer, J. and Hutchings, J.A. 1999. Fisheries assessment: what can be learned from interviewing resource users? *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences* 56: 1949–1963.

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Date:

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