



Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E6

MAY 15 2017

Mr. Josepi Padlayat
Chairperson
Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board
P.O. Box 433
Inukjuak, Quebec J0M 1M0

Mr. Roderick Pachano
Chairperson
Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board
18 Nottaway Street
Waskaganish, Quebec J0M 1R0

Dear Mr. Padlayat and Mr. Pachano:

Thank you for your correspondence of March 17, 2017, with respect to the decisions made by the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) and of the Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board (EMRWB) regarding beluga whale harvesting in the Nunavik Marine Region (NMR), including the Joint Cree / Inuit Zone, for the period ending January 31st 2020. Pursuant to section 5.5.8 of the *Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement* (NILCA) and to section 15.3.7 of the *Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement* (EMRLCA), I am providing my written response and the reasons for the response.

First, I commend the members of the NMRWB and its staff for the efforts made to consult with partner organizations and interested parties prior to submitting the decision and for the careful consideration of the input that you received. I also appreciate that an important non-quota limitation (NQL), namely, the closing of the Mucalic, Little Whale, and the Nastapoka Estuaries, as well as the decision to maintain the application of *Marine Mammal Regulations* pertaining to beluga calves and adults accompanied by calves as DFO views this as an important conservation measure for beluga whales. As you know, Canada has set an objective to protect a minimum of 10% of marine areas by 2020 and 5% by 2017. Over the next year, we will consult and work with you regarding identifying appropriate areas in the NMR and the possibility of recognizing these areas as part of the waters currently subject to protective measures. Your request that further research on the use of the estuaries is noted. Relevant DFO personnel will evaluate it and work with you should additional research occur.

DFO is also supportive of the commitment and efforts towards improving communications respecting the management plan and the enhanced involvement of local and regional collaborators such as the Local Nunavimmi Umajulirijiit Katujjiqatigiinninga (LNUKs) and the Regional Nunavimmi Umajulirijiit Katujjiqatigiinninga (RNUK) in the implementation of the management plan. In your Rationale and Support document, you state that the RNUK allocation workshop is to be financially supported by DFO. I trust that administrative matters related to the TAT and NQL decisions, such as your recommendations regarding allocation workshops, will be coordinated through the relevant treaty implementation processes. However, I can assure you that regional officials from DFO will certainly work in a concerted fashion with you and all our partners in Nunavik and Eeyou Itschee to support

improved communications and implementation in a manner that is consistent with our longstanding history of collaboration and with the roles and responsibilities and procedures outlined in the NILCA.

With respect to the TAT of 187 EHB beluga whales over a three-year period, I appreciate that the boards have considered the ensemble of socio-economic and scientific and traditional knowledge currently available regarding the abundance and distribution of this population. As the approach proposed has allowed the population to remain stable, I accept the Boards decisions to set a combined TAT of 187 EHB beluga whales for the 2017, 2018 and 2019 hunting seasons and the associated NQLs as outlined in the March 17, 2017, letter.

However, as you are aware, pursuant to the principles and objectives outlined in sections 5.1.2(h) and 5.1.3(b) of the NILCA, wildlife management systems should be governed by the principles of conservation set out in section 5.1.5 of the NILCA. It is therefore important to note that this level of harvest is at a level of risk that is associated with a 50% probability of a decline in the EHB beluga population. The restoration and the revitalization of depleted populations of wildlife would be an important and preferable objective to pursue for healthy ecosystems and to ensure that harvesting needs can be sustained in the future. As such, I strongly recommend that, regardless of the new measures that are sought for future management plans, that the co-management partners work together to explore the use of the precautionary approach decision framework in order to reduce the level of risk and uncertainty associated with the current approach and achieve our shared conservation objectives. In a context where conservation concerns are high and roles and responsibilities are evolving, it is important that we continue to work together to evaluate the current system and identify areas of improvement for the next management plan.

The NMRWB and the EMRWB are valued partners in the effective management of marine resources in the Nunavik Marine Region, and DFO looks forward to continued collaboration with your boards and your staff on resource management issues.

Yours sincerely,



Dominic Leblanc, P.C., Q.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

c.c.: Mr. Patrick Vincent, Regional Director General, DFO – Quebec Region
Mr. Adam Burns, Acting Director General, Fisheries Resource Management, Ottawa