

Nunavik Beluga Working Group Report to the NMRWB

Re: 2019 Review of Beluga Management System

When the decision was made to set a limit on harvest in the 1980's, DFO was the primary manager of belugas in the marine waters around Nunavik. By signing the Nunavik Land Claim Agreement, Government of Canada acknowledges the Nunavik Marine region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) as the main instrument of wildlife management in the Nunavik Marine Region (NMR). Since then, the NMRWB has implemented a flexible management approach focused on the conservation of Eastern Hudson Bay (EHB) beluga. The NMRWB process has allowed for greater consideration of Inuit knowledge into management decisions, including through the implementation of pilot projects (e.g. on Hudson Strait Fall migration, Kuujuaapik spring season, etc.).

Recognizing that the current management system (2017-2020) continues to require improvement, the Nunavik Beluga Working Group (NBWG) was struck in 2018 to provide recommendations to the NMRWB that seek to improve upon its last set of decisions. This group is composed of representatives from Makivik, the NMRWB, the RNUK and DFO (science and management).

The working group has met several times over the course of the past year. Throughout this time, it has become clear to the working group that it is both unlikely and inappropriate for the working group to make a single recommendation about the future of beluga management in Nunavik.

Instead, the NBWG agreed to lay out the pros and cons associated to a variety of management options ranging from maintaining the status quo to eliminating the quota system altogether. We have also listed several other considerations which may serve to guide the thought process of all parties intending to make submissions to the NMRWB public hearing.

It is important to note that we do not presume that these are the only options and considerations that must be taken into account by the NMRWB. This document is equally not intended to indicate support, or lack thereof, for any of the options. Lastly, this document has been prepared by the members of the Nunavik Beluga Working Group and does not represent or restrict the positions that their respective organizations will take during the public hearing process.

Please find attached a table which summarizes the key considerations identified during meetings of the Nunavik Beluga Working Group.

Pros and Cons	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: Minor tweaks	Option 3: Regional TAT and season	Option 4: No TAT
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain the current system as-is. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The TAT system is kept but updated with more recent information (e.g. new genetic proportions). Other changes, such as estuary closures, can also be considered. Improvements are made to bolster how co-management partners report to the Board and includes more in outreach towards the LNUKs and hunters. Task force is created to review over issues from the last year and RNUK enforcement issues. 	<p>A) Split regions with their own TAT. The NMR could be separated into multiple management units (e.g. Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, Ungava Bay), each with its own TAT that is independent from the other regions.</p> <p>B) Split Regions with some areas being managed only via NQLs (e.g. TAT is implemented only in Hudson Bay, with other regions using alternative management methods).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beluga management effected strictly with non-quota limitations (i.e. no quantitative limits on the number of beluga that can be harvested, anywhere).
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system is already known to all parties involved. Ensures that any future consultations regarding the next management cycle will be based on a system that is known. Maintains the flexibility of a Nunavik-wide TAT with possible adjustments between years and seasons. Large space for self-management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most up-to-date info (e.g. Adjusted percentages reflect most recent genetic data). Implementation easier than option 3 since most parameters are known (but harder than option 1 since new element to be added). Addresses issues that do not require overhaul of the mgmt. system (e.g. estuaries). Maintains the flexibility that was built into the current plan. Focus on refining specific areas, rather than trying to implement a completely new system. Demonstration of comprehension that current plan is not perfect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for a more refined application of management actions (i.e. separate mgmt. approach in different regions) and of our understanding beluga genetics. Potential to move away from quota system (depending on the structure of new system). Reduced possibility for communities to impact each other's TAT (i.e. one region could close while the others remain open). Partially addresses requests to completely overhaul the management system. Simpler enforcement of the management decisions, relying mainly on use of DFO Closures. Potential compliance improvements from self-governance of management units by LNUKs supported by the RNUK. Demonstrates openness and dedication to consider and undertake significant changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds to the request of many Inuit to do away with the quota system. Reduces need to travel long distances to harvest. Reduces inter-community conflicts

<p>Cons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fails to respond to the request of communities for a complete overhaul of the beluga management system. • Promotion by LNUKs in recent years has led to increased buy-in for the sampling program. • Failure to integrate the new genetic information could be perceived by some LNUK as though their efforts of Nunavik are not leading to anything differences in the management approach. • Does not address issues related to implementation and enforceability (e.g. community allocations). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued reliance on percentage system. • Continues to be a Nunavik-wide application of the allocations. The hunt from a community still has the potential of impacting the possible harvest of others. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could also be seen as an advantage since hunting could take place anywhere. • Does not represent the complete overhaul that some Inuit have called for. • The compliance issue is only addressed through better communication and outreach. A Taskforce won't bring immediate improvement and might require structures and implementation timelines. • Difficult to manage expectations regarding estuaries (i.e. duration of research needed, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas have not been fully discussed, developed and analyzed. • There have been no consultations with Nunavik Inuit, though a NMRWB hearing may lessen this concern. • There has been no analysis of impacts by DFO or any of the other parties. • There is a risk that this could lead to poor implementation of a good idea, simply because it was put together in haste (i.e. we don't know what needs to be implemented, or if the proper tools are already available to do so). • Potentially less flexibility than is found in current system since some of the decision-making is transferred to the NMRWB, from the RNUK (i.e. inter-annual and inter-community adjustments are subjected to the NMRWB decision-making process) • Increase in the number of management systems that need to be coordinated (more moving parts). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete removal of all quantitative limits may not be aligned with NILCA principle of conservation • Compensating for absence of quantitative limits by applying non-quota limitations may result in a more rigid management approach (e.g. complete or seasonal closures of some areas). • Could result in local decline of beluga whales in some areas (e.g. Hudson Bay) and could result in more restrictive limits in the future.
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Other Considerations

- Flexibility:
 - A system based on NQLs may be less flexible than a system based on TAT (e.g. if an NQL is established indicating an annual closed hunting season, then bad weather during the open hunting season may severely limit hunting or completely negate hunting that season)
 - Applying triggers to open/close seasons rather than calendar dates (e.g. LNUK president responsible for determining when HS pilot project starts based on arrival of WHB herds) may be a way to lessen this concern, but managers must then determine how to define those triggers (e.g. what trigger can be used to define the start/end of WHB beluga migration? A mix of methods could be used where local knowledge may trigger the start of hunting season, but only within a range of dates (before which the season cannot be opened, and after which the season will automatically open).

- Adjust percentages to reflect most recent info
 - Adjust the percentages based on most recent sampling campaigns.
 - Consider new seasons/regions with distinct genetics (i.e.: Leaf Bay in spring and summer; Hudson Strait late fall).

- Re-examine the pilot project considerations and how the results are taken into account
 - any merit in tweaking the dates?
 - Consider triggers-based opening vs. calendar date (see flexibility, above)
 - Determine how the results of the pilot project will be debited / credited the next year

- Estuary closures in EHB: consider options (re-opening, maintain closure, etc.). Re-examine the purpose and rationale of the closures and ensure they are relevant under the current system.

- Closure at Mucalic: could it be considered as possible pilot project?
 - Based on the number of whales that are being hunted there already – make it legal and ensure proper sampling + reporting of observations
 - Inuit Knowledge suggests Ungava was never an actual population, or that it disappeared many years ago (presence in Ungava mainly varies according to ice conditions in HS)
 - 1st year of research in 2019 (3 samples from biopsies). Ideally, more samples are needed to draw clear conclusions about this area (inclusion or exclusion).
 - Consider information from recent IK study of the area

- Improve communications:
 - What type of communication is needed to ensure that information collected about beluga whales is available to communities?
 - What is needed in order to ensure that there are clear lines of communication between managers and hunters so the NMRWB can assess success of its management decisions?

- Struck and lost:
 - Struck-and-lost estimates in the current management regime are accounted for in population models and include both real struck-and-lost events as well as unreported harvesting. How can we get a better understanding of true struck-and-lost numbers so that population estimates are more accurate?

- LNUK role in beluga management:
 - What role should LNUKs play in managing local hunting practices (e.g. previous plans assumed that LNUKs would draft local hunt plans to provide guidance to their hunters, these plans have never been firmly established or defined, what is the consequence/remedy for this, etc.)?

- Gear types: Beluga management measures include restrictions on the type of equipment that can be used. Are any changes necessary?