Public Hearing Conference Call Notes

Public Hearing held by conference call on July 20th, 2022 – 1:30-5pm
ᔪᓐ 20, 2022 / ᐅᓪᓗᑯᑦ 1:30-ᒥᑦ 5:00-ᖓᒧᑦ

To consider modifying the current Beluga Management System in the Nunavik Marine Region by removing or modifying the annual December 1 - January 31 closure of beluga hunting in Hudson Strait

ᐃᓱᒪᑦᓴᓯᐅᕈᑎᐅᓚᖓᔪᑦ ᐋᖅᑭᒋᐊᕐᑕᐅᔪᑦᓴᐅᒪᖕᒑᑕ ᑕᒐᑕᒐ ᕿᓚᓗᒐᕐᓂᒃ ᑲᒪᒋᔭᖃᕐᑎᐅᓂᕐᓄᑦ ᐱᓇᓱᒍᑎᓕᐊᖕᒍᒪᔪᑦ ᓄᓇᕗᐅᑉ ᑕᕆᐅᕐᑯᑎᖓᑕ ᓄᓇᕐᑯᑎᖏᓐᓂᒃ ᐲᕐᑕᐅᓗᑎᓪᓗᓃᑦ ᐅᕝᕙᓘᓐᓃᑦ ᐋᖅᑭᒋᐊᕐᑕᐅᓗᑎᒃ ᐊᕐᕌᒍᑕᒫᑦ ᑏᓯᒪᐱᕆ 1-ᒥᑦ ᑎᑭᑦᓱᒍ ᓴᓄᐊᕆ 31 ᑎᑭᑦᓱᒍ ᕿᓚᓗᒐᕐᓂᐊᖃᔪᑎᓯᓯᒪᖕᒍᑎᐅᓲᑦ ᓄᕗᐊᓘᑉ ᐃᒪᖓᓂ

IMPORTANT: Many times throughout the conference call, the audio quality degraded to the point that note-taking was difficult or impossible. We have indicated the worst moments throughout the document with the following note:

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List of participants to the public hearings

NMRWB:
Staff: Tommy Palliser, Mark Basterfield, Qajaq Robinson (legal counsel), Frankie Jean-Gagnon, Mary Mina, Janice Kasudluak.

Board: Salamiva Weetaltuk, Vallee Saunders, Robert Moshenko, Iola Metuq, Jean-Pierre Savard, Harry Okpik.

LNUKs:
Kangiqsualujjuaq: David-Danny Ananack
Tasiujaq: Billy Dan, Johnny Cain
Aupaluk: Billie Luccassie, Charlie Angutinguak
Kangirsuk: Noah Eetook, Lizzie Thomassie, Etua Lucassie
Quaqtaq: Johnny Oovaut, Jusipi Kulula, Sammy Tukkiapik, Daniel Oovaut.
Kangiqsujuaq: Elisa Alaku, Sandy Yaka
Salluit: Johnny Papigatuk, Daniel, Eli Konnanack
Ivujivik: Pauloosie Tariasuk, Charlie [need surname]
Akulivik: Eli Angiyou
Inukjuak: Jobie Oweetaluktuk, Jackie Williams, Danieli Aculiak
Umiujaq: Jack Niviaxie, Jackie Kumarluk
Kuujjuarapik: Silas Cookie, Johnny Fleming, Willie Novalinga
Chisasibi: Richard Tookalook

LNUKs absent: Kuujjuaq, Kangirsuk, Puvirnituq

RNUK: Ricky Moorhouse, Jordan Shields, Johnny Arnaituk.

Makivik: Gregor Gilbert, Laurie Beaupré.

DFO: Félix Dionne, Mike Hammill, Anne Provencher St-Pierre, Antoine Rivière, Mathieu Pélerin, Pat Hall.

NTI: David Lee

NWMB: Denis Ndeloh

Part 1: Opening and Background / ᐱᓇᓱᑦᑕᐅᔪᑦ ᓯᕗᓪᓕᐸᖓᑦ: ᐅᒃᑯᐃᓯᓂᕐᓗ ᐱᕙᓪᓕᐊᓯᒪᓂᕐᓗ

1. Opening Prayer / ᑐᑦᓯᐅᑎᓄᑦ ᑲᑎᖕᖓᓂᐅᑉ ᐅᒃᑯᐃᑕᐅᓂᖓ

Salamiva Weetaltuk opened with a prayer and chaired the public hearing.

2. Call to order opening of Public Hearing Conference Call / ᑲᑎᖕᖓᔪᓂᑦᑐᑦ ᑭᓇᒃᑯᓂᖏᑦ ᓈᑦᓯᒍᑎᒃᑯᓗ ᐅᒃᑯᓯᓂᖅ ᐃᓄᓕᒫᓂᒃ ᑐᑭᓯᓂᐊᕐᕕᖕᕐᓂᒥᒃ ᑲᑎᖕᖓᒍᑎᖕᕐᓂᖅ ᐅᖕᑳᓚᐅᑎᑎᒍᑦ (ᓴᓚᒦᕙ ᐅᐃᑖᓪᑐᖅ)

A Board member asked if items #5 and #6 are going to be part of the hearing records? It was further asked if there are going to be questions and answers? If so, it was suggested that item #7 be first so everybody knows what the rules and responsibilities are.

The Board legal counsel responded that those two items (5 and 6) are part of the hearing records, i.e. background and explanation from Board staff, and purpose and justification from DFO (in part 1). In Part 2, if the LNUKs have questions on the background or on the purpose of the hearing, then questions can be asked.

3. Review of Agenda / ᑐᑭᒧᐊᒍᑏᑦ ᐊᖏᕐᑕᐅᓂᖏᑦ

The chair reviewed the agenda and asked for any comments.

4. Introductions, Format, Chairing and Moderation / ᑭᓇᒃᑯᒥᕐᒥᓂᒃ ᐅᖕᑳᔪᑦ, ᖃᓄᐃᓕᖓᓃᑦ, ᑐᑭᒧᐊᑦᑎᓯᓃᑦ ᐊᒻᒪᓗ ᐊᑯᓃᓗᐊᕐᒐᓕᓂᖅ

A Board staff explained why the hearing is taking place in the summer, and how it will go. Salamiva Weetaltuk is chairing the public hearing. The NMRWB Chairperson, Iola Metuq, is observing and calling from Pangnirtung, Nunavut. The format for the hearing this afternoon is as follows: there will be presentations from Board staff and from DFO on the background and the purpose of the meeting. The Board legal counselor will explain how the hearing will proceed. In the closing remarks, the next steps will be explained. The questions and comments will be able to be submitted to the NMRWB until next week on Wednesday July 27th.

5. Background and Explanation of the topic / ᐱᕙᓪᓕᐊᓯᒪᓂᕐᓗ ᑐᑭᓯᑎᑦᓯᒍᑎᖃᕐᓂᓗ ᐅᖃᔭᐅᓚᖓᔪᓂᒃ

a. The 2021-2026 Beluga management system, and the purpose of seasonal closures / 2021-ᒥᑦ 2026-ᒧᑦ ᕿᓚᓗᒐᕐᓂᒃ ᑲᒪᒋᔭᖃᕐᑎᐅᓂᕐᒥᒃ ᐱᓇᓱᒍᑏᑦ ᐊᒻᒪᓗ ᐱᑦᔪᑎᖏᑦ ᓇᓪᓕᐅᑎᑦᑕᑐᓂᒃ ᕿᓚᓗᒐᕐᓂᐊᓇᖕᖏᑐᑎᑦᓯᓂᐅᓲᖅ

This hearing is very specifically about the closed season for beluga hunting in Hudson Strait in December and January of each year. This closure is not based on any quota, but is simply a closure that happens during those two months of each year.

The background for this public hearing starts back in 2020 when the NMRWB held the big public hearing in Kuujjuarapik to review beluga management in Nunavik. Almost all beluga harvested in East Hudson Bay (EHB) are from the EHB stocks, and most other beluga harvested are from the big western Hudson Bay stock. Sometimes, there are mixes between EHB and WHB stocks.

During the hearing held in 2020, there was a clear indication that a closure in Hudson Strait would be a better approach than a all-of-Nunavik quota system. Specifically, the closure in Hudson Strait in the early fall was a good way to protect the EHB beluga harvest without much impact on hunting. The intention was to allow LNUKs to open the hunt in the fall after the smaller and earlier EHB beluga pass, and hunters would not have the rush to hunt. That was the intention with the early fall closure in Hudson Strait. The overall idea was that if there is an early season closure and no quota after it, it should shift the hunting to later when the WHB belugas pass (and minimize harvest of the EHB belugas). After the 2020 public hearing, the NMRWB included it in its 5-year Management Plan according to the reasons heard at the hearing.

b. How the December-January Seasonal closure came to be / ᖃᓄᐃᓕᑦᓯᓂ ᕿᓚᓗᒐᕐᓂᐊᓇᖕᖏᑐᑎᑦᓯᓂᖅ ᑏᓯᒻᐱᕆᒥᑦ ᔭᓄᐊᕆᒧᑦ ᐱᕙᓪᓕᐊᓂᖃᓯᓐᓂᒪᖕᒑᑦ

The NMRWB decision must be approved by the DFO Minister. The first thing that happens is, the Board makes an initial decision which the Minister can accept, or reject, and then a final decision which the Minister can accept, reject, or make changes to. The December and January closure was not discussed during the public hearing or during the decision-making process in 2020 but was added by the Minister to the NMRWB decision. Now, we are holding this hearing (today) to see if this closure (Dec-Jan) should be maintained, changed or canceled.

6. Purpose and Justification of the December-January Annual Hudson Strait Closure / ᐱᑦᔪᑎᖏᓪᓗ ᐊᒻᒪᓗ ᓈᒻᒪᓈᕆᒍᑎᐅᓯᒪᓂᕐᑕᐅᓂᖏᑦ ᑏᓯᒻᐱᕆᒥᓗ-ᔭᓄᐊᕆᒥᓗ ᐊᕐᕋᒍᑕᒫᑦ ᓄᕗᐊᔫᑉ ᐃᒪᖓᓂ ᕿᓚᓗᒐᕐᓂᐊᓇᖏᑐᑎᑦᓯᓂᐅᓲᑉ

A DFO staff first thanked the Board for launching a hearing to consider the closure in Hudson Strait from December 1st to January 31st. To begin, DFO wants to state the importance of the government in decision making pertaining to indigenous harvest and wildlife conservation. Beluga is an important species to conserve and protect. DFO recognizes the need for Inuit to hunt beluga, as well as for women and youth to be learning, for the Cree and to protect the cultural aspect of hunting beluga.

The health of beluga stocks is important. In 2020, the Board and DFO worked together on a management plan and included important changes to the previous plan. The objective of the management plan is to maintain the population of EHB belugas at 3,400 animals over 5 years. To reach this, the Board establishes a total allowable take (TAT) for EHB, and set up a closure in the fall to limit the EHB harvest over the 5 years of the plan. In her response to the Board, the Minister said that a quota had been in place for many years and the impacts of different management measures are difficult to predict. DFO was particularly concerned that with no TAT in Hudson Strait, the harvest of EHB beluga could exceed the threshold of 62 belugas put in place by the Board, and this could jeopardize the objective of maintaining 3,400 animals.

The chairperson clarified that it is 3,400 animals and not 34,000 animals, as was mistakenly stated previously. It was also asked which Boards are DFO speaking about? A DFO staff member answered that the two Boards spoken about here are the EMRWB and the NMRWB.

The DFO staff member continued. Must work collectively to ensure the beluga conservation measures are met. To develop and plan hunting measures, DFO also offered help and support to the co-management partners.

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----- Break from 3:05pm to 3:20pm -----

The DFO staff continued their presentation. Overall, the reported harvest of 96 EHB belugas is well over the 58 threshold decided by the Minister. Last year, there was a significant harvest increase in the North Eastern Hudson Bay management unit where the TAT and seasonal closure doesn't apply. However, the North-Eastern Hudson Bay unit is adjacent to the EHB summer range area, and both telemetry and other data show that beluga migrate between these units. The complexity of the current plan suggests that perhaps changing one piece of the plan will affect other parts of the management. The NMRWB/EMRWB management plan brings significant and new approaches based on western science and Inuit Knowledge to the management of belugas. Therefore, caution must be taken.

7. Roles of the NMRWB and the parties in Part 2 / ᓄᓇᕗᒻᒥ ᑕᕆᐅᕐᒥᐅᑕᓕᕆᔨᒃᑯᑦ ᑲᑎᒪᔨᖕᒋᑕ ᖃᓄᐃᓗᕐᑎᐅᓂᖕᒋᑦ ᐊᐅᓚᑦᓯᖃᑕᐅᕙᑦᑐᓗ ᐱᓇᓱᒍᑎᐅᔪᑦ ᑐᖕᒐᓕᖕᒋᓐᓂ

The legal counsel explained that it has been indicated that the purpose of today's hearing is to consider the December-January closure in Hudson Strait as described in the decision from the Minister sent on November 26th, 2020. The closure is from December 1st to January 31. Under NILCA section 5.2.3 e) and 5.2.19, the wildlife Board has the authority to establish, modify or remove NQLs, and for today, the Board wants to hear from you (LNUKs and other meeting participants) and your organizations, on what your position is on it, and for you to ask questions you might have. The goal is to ensure that the Board members have all the information from you to make their decisions. They are on the line listening and learning from you, and to hear what your concerns are. They can ask questions too. They will then prepare a decision that will be sent to the Minister. When you speak, say your name and your community.

A final point is that hearing records and all other documents will be available on the Board's website.

Part 2: Public Hearing Input / ᐁᑉᐱᐅᑎᖕᒋᑦ 2: ᐃᓄᓕᒫᓂᒃ ᑐᑭᓯᓂᐊᕐᕕᖕᒐᕐᓂᒥᑦ

8. Opportunities Statements and Questions: / ᐱᕕᑦᓴᖕᒐᕐᑎᓯᒍᑎᖕᒐᕐᓃᑦ ᐊᓪᓚᓯᒪᔪᖕᖕᒍᐃᓂᕐᓄᓗ ᐊᐱᕐᓱᑎᓄᓪᓗ:

a. Questions and Statements from LNUKs and Communities / ᐊᐱᕐᓱᕈᑏᓪᓗ

i. Quaqtaq / ᕐᑯᐊᕐᑕᖅ

A Board member raised a question pertaining to the closure of December-January: Why does it close so early after it opens? Considering the late arrival of beluga in our area, i.e. Hudson Strait, they come in two batches. Western Hudson Bay stock is passing through, in the highest abundance during this time, i.e. November, December and January, and because there is no quota limit on WHB, what is the purpose of the closure? The Board member indicated he had never been given a detailed explanation for this.

A DFO staff member explained that the reason why DFO implemented a closure in December and January is because DFO was particularly concerned that without a TAT, the harvest of EHB beluga would increase and this would prevent the recovery of the EHB stock. An additional closure in the winter could offset the high harvest levels during the year. DFO knows, for example, that the proportion of EHB in Hudson Strait in December and January is much lower than what is presented in the earlier fall harvest. In the spring, the focus can be on WHB.

DFO recognizes that even though the proportion of EHB animals decreases in late fall, the department is still concerned that the overall TAC exceeds the 58 animals threshold. This is why DFO needs to consider what is taken in the summer and fall, to meet the conservation objective of maintaining 3,400 belugas.

The chairperson requested the participants to ask clear and short questions, and to stay on topic.

The Quaqtaq LNUK commented that they felt it was not going to be much of a problem, the closure in December and January because not many people go hunting at that time. The LNUK is not against the closure because in winter time, they don’t do much hunting, during the time of the closure, i.e. in December and January.

ii. Kangiqsujuaq / ᑲᖏᕐᓱᔪᐊᖅ

The Kangiqsujuaq LNUK has been on the radio for unanswered questions. The depletion [of EHB beluga] and also the no quota in Sanikiluaq should be X, because they have no quota. Sanikiluaq Inuit should be under this plan as well. The depletion is evident, but the LNUK is not in agreement with the December-January closure because they sometimes observe beluga that can be trapped in ice, and they could hunt them when the ice is hard enough to move.

A Board staff member clarified to the Kangiqsujuaq LNUK manager that they have until July 27 to send questions to the Board.

iii. Salluit / ᓴᓪᓗᐃᑦ

A LNUK member commented that they do not have any questions at the moment. They would like to consult with their community through FM before July 27th.

A Board staff confirmed that they can provide questions and comments before July 27th.

The chairperson reminded the participants the importance of staying on the topic of the December-January closure in Hudson Strait.

iv. Ivujivik / ᐃᕗᔨᖅᑲᒃ

The LNUK of Ivujivik explained that even since they were provided with quota (…) the stock increases (…). There are other communities coming to hunt in Ivujivik. They welcome people to come harvest as long as they keep everything clean as much as possible.

The chairperson mentioned that for other questions, participants can wait at the end.

It was further added by the LNUK that in Ivujivik, it is a place where the ice does not freeze up whereas for other communities, it would freeze. Puvirnituq got to Ivujivik by plane, and this would be better since their area gets closed in from fall/winter ice around their communities, while Ivujivik still has open water most of the fall times and early winter. They do not mind other communities coming to harvest there by plane to do their own harvesting, since Ivujivik is a place where the ice does not freeze.

The LNUK also commented that for the closure from December 1st to January 31st, they do not have an issue with this timeline but there are other communities that come and harvest. And to

please note that when other communities get iced-in early, it would be preferable if communities like Puvirnituq come by airplane.

One more thing to say since NMRWB is listening, because their local hunters in Ivujivik had to hunt for Aupaluk and one other community. It costs more to hunt for the communities than what they provide for expenses. It would be better if the communities send their own hunters, since there are canoes available to use and to hunt with the local hunters, before the closure. They don't want their local people to hunt for other people because they ended up having to pay and spend more.

Ivujivik is okay with the closure, but believe that some adjustments and changes need to be made to allow for the communities of Kangiqsujuaq and Quaqtaq to harvest since the belugas migrate later around their areas. A later closure for them would make more sense and Ivujivik would support this.

v. Akulivik / ᐊᑯᓕᕝᕕᒃ

The LNUK of Akulivik commented that it is okay to have a closure for one month in January. Also, they support the Hudson Strait community if they are okay with the closure. On the other hand, the LNUK raised the question "why is there a closure in January when not many people are looking for beluga?" It seems unnecessary. The LNUK supports the LNUKs of Ivujivik and Quaqtaq, and fully supports the efforts from NMRWB. It was concluded that they will not hold themselves back in the case where there are belugas passing by.

Additional elaboration sent by email: In the vicinity of Akulivik hunting area the belugas are sometimes stranded in the ice when fast ice freeze up accures which happens every decade or so on the month of December and January, the hunters of Akulivik will not be restrained by any regulation and continue harvesting and relieving the belugas from stress, by mercy killing.

vi. Inukjuak

Jobie Oweetaluktuk: The LNUK of Inukjuak is listening and observing, and will support what will be decided for Hudson Strait.

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The chairperson clarified that the closure from December 1st to January 31st came from DFO and not from NMRWB. This is to correct a previous comment that was mistaken.

vii. Umiujaq

The LNUK of Umiujaq supports the closure for those months. They are just wondering if there is information available on the Sanikiluaq stock.

viii. Kuujjuarapik

The LNUK in Kuujjuarapik is fully in support of the closure.

ix. Chisasibi

The Chisasibi LNUK fully supports the closure. They talked with their beluga hunters and they also fully agreed.

A Board staff indicating there may be some misunderstanding, and will try to clarify. There is no proposal that needs approval today. The purpose of today is to gather information and perspectives on the December/January closure, which is already a management measure that is in place. This is so the Board can analyze whether this is an appropriate measure.

x. Aupaluk

The LNUK of Aupaluk commented that they do not agree with the closing time because the EHB stock has passed by earlier in the fall. The LNUK also raised a question for DFO: Does DFO know that EHB belugas hang out there [in Hudson Strait] in December-January?

A DFO staff responded that some animals are in Hudson Strait and also in the Eastern part of Ungava Bay, and the Labrador Sea in December and January. They know they are present, but don't know how high the numbers are.

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xi. Tasiujaq

The LNUK of Tasiujaq wants to comment on the fall closure. They understand that EHB beluga overwinter in Hudson Strait, Ungava Bay and Labrador Sea. Where did DFO get that information? Also, the fall migration is getting later and later, and it is thought that the closure should be in the middle of December to compensate for the fluctuations.

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The Chair asked DFO to respond to the questions that have been asked.

A DFO staff member responded that the DFO staff on the call have taken all the questions into account, and will consider some of them in their written answers.

Regarding if there is a case of whale entrapment in ice: In case of entrapment, DFO can rely on experiences that happened in other regions, and using different approaches that can lead to a humane harvest. Developing such protocols is something that was offered by DFO to collaborate with LNUKs. The LNUKs answered that they would like to work with Makivik first, then bring it to DFO.

Regarding the question that relates to whether the quota has any effect on the population of EHB: This might need to be completed by DFO science folks. According to our study from 1982, our application of quota seems to have slowed down the decline of EHB beluga, and then stopped the decline and stabilized the population. Since 2016, there were ups and downs but seems to have led to a decline in the population. This information comes from the aerial surveys DFO is conducting.

Another question was about where do belugas overwinter. This relates to research done in the 1990s and prior to that. Assuming that beluga are reaching an area that is free of ice. It was done by telemetry at that time. There is also an indication in late harvest that indicates that they are still present in the late fall harvest.

The last question was about a better timeline for the closure considering the change in migration pattern and timeline. That is something that the department is ready for and open to considering. Nevertheless, DFO is focused on the management objective. If there are good reasons to change the timeline and to make the measures better, these are all possibilities DFO is ready to consider. It might require some meetings and good information to make sure it would work.

d. Questions and Statements from Makivik / ᐊᐱᕐᓲᑎᓪᓗ ᐊᓪᓚᓯᒪᔪᖕᖕᒍᑕᐅᒪᔪᓪᓗ ᐱᔪᑦ ᒪᑭᕝᕕᒥᑦ

A Makivik staff member commented that Makivik will be submitting a written statement and questions to the Hearing by July 27th. The only comment they have for DFO at this time is, it seems to Makivik that the objective of the December-January closure is to meet a conservation purpose. The burden of this focus on the EHB should be on all rights holders harvesting from the EHB belugas. Will DFO be putting in place mandatory measures for the hunters and community of Sanikiluaq to affect the management concerns for EHB beluga?

f. Questions from NMRWB members / ᐊᐱᕐᔪᑏᑦ ᐱᔪᑦ ᓄᓇᕗᒻᒥ ᑕᕆᐅᕐᒥᐅᑕᓕᕆᔨᒃᑯᑦ ᑲᑎᖕᖕᒐᔨᖏᓐᓄᑦ ᐃᓚᐅᔪᓂᑦ

A Board member commented that it is not clear if he heard support of the “closure or the proposal”. The Board member wants to make sure that staff has the right information or can follow up with communities afterward.

10. Closing Remarks / ᑲᑎᖕᖕᒐᓂᕐᒥᒃ ᐅᒃᑯᐊᓯᓂᖅ

A Board staff concluded the hearing explaining to the participants that they have until July 27th to provide comments and statements. The answers will be provided by DFO to the Board by Friday August 5th. The Board staff will review all the information and organize all this to have it reviewed by the Board as soon as possible, likely within 2 weeks of the hearing ending. The Minister will then have 60 days to provide her answer to the Board. These are going to be the next steps.

------- Public Hearings end at 5:30pm -------