



MAKIVIK CORPORATION

Public hearing 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

Submission to the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board

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Introduction

Makivik Corporation (hereafter referred to as Makivik) wishes to express its opinion to the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) on the annual December 1 - January 31 closure of beluga hunting in Hudson Strait in the hope that these comments will contribute to the improvement of the current beluga management system to promote the harvesting rights of Nunavik Inuit while giving full consideration of the principle of conservation for the beluga populations in the Nunavik Marine Region (NMR).

Considerations

The NMRWB, as the main instrument of wildlife management in the NMR under the Nunavik Inuit Land Claim Agreement (NILCA), must consider both western science and Inuit knowledge when making management decisions. After years of having a detrimental quota system imposed on Nunavik Inuit by the federal government, the NMRWB has upheld its mandate and proposed an Inuit-led beluga management plan that would both empower Inuit to manage their resource while meeting the conservation concerns for the Eastern Hudson Bay (EHB) beluga population. Makivik welcomed the management plan proposed by the NMRWB, which promised to address many of the problems faced by the quota system.

However, several decisions that we felt were essential to a real and significant change in the management system were unfortunately varied by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), including the addition of an annual December 1 - January 31 closure of beluga hunting in Hudson Strait.

The variation of this decision seems to have no valid basis in either western science and Inuit knowledge but rather seems to be the result of an unfounded fear that the proposed changes in the management system and the greater responsibilities giving to Inuit could be too unpredictable. Therefore, DFO did not give this new management approach a real chance of success and failed to truly break from the federal regime that existed prior to the NILCA.

Indeed, the current state of knowledge suggests that the proportion of EHB beluga decreases as the fall migration progress since the EHB population migrates earlier in the fall while the Western Hudson Bay (WHB) population migrate later. The proportion of EHB would therefore be lower later in the fall. Based on the comments and answers provided by the LNUKs and RNUK for this public hearing and the discussions held during the annual beluga management review meeting in April 2022, it seems that the annual December 1 - January 31 closure creates disadvantages towards communities that are located east of the Hudson Strait and creates an undue pressure on Inuit to harvest during a short period of time. Moreover, it causes some communities to depend on communities further west in the Hudson Strait to get the belugas they need which creates its own sets of problems. These issues can be exacerbated if the November opening is delayed and if the weather conditions are not favourable for harvesting. LNUKs are therefore in the best position to implement the appropriate management measures, with their by-laws, according to the regional and local conditions.

Recommendation

Considering that this decision to vary from the NMRWB decision is not based on solid evidence either from the western science or the Inuit knowledge and given that other management measures are in place in this management plan to avoid the over-harvesting of the EHB stock, such an arbitrary decision to close the beluga hunt in December and January is unfounded and should be removed.

Conclusion

Makivik would like to thank the NMRWB for conducting this public hearing which we hope will lead to the removal of the annual December 1 - January 31 closure of beluga hunting in Hudson Strait and thus remove the unnecessary pressure on Nunavik Inuit harvesters while giving the latitude to the RNUK and LNUKs to implement management measures with their members that will support Nunavik hunters and be respectful of the resource. We believe that this decision to vary the NMRWB decision was not within the spirit of the NILCA, especially in building a system of wildlife management that “promotes public confidence in wildlife management, particularly amongst Nunavik Inuit” (NILCA 5.1.3 (h)). This public hearing is an opportunity to review this decision and move towards a true co-management system.