



MAKIVVIK CORPORATION

Comments pertaining the listing of killer whale and bowhead whale as “Special Concern” under the Canadian Species at Risk Act

Submission to the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board

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www.makivvik.org

○ Head Office • Siège Social
C.P. 179
Kuujuaq QC J0M 1C0
Tél. (819) 964-2925
Fax (819) 964-2613

○ Montréal
1111, boul. D' Frederik-Philips 3^e étage
St-Laurent QC H4M 2X6
Tél. (514) 745-8880
Fax (514) 745-3700

○ Québec
580, Grande-Allée E.
Suite 350
Québec QC G1R 2K2
Tél. (418) 522.2224

○ Ottawa
75 Albert St
Suite 1006
Ottawa ON K1P 5E5
Tél. (613) 234-5530

Introduction

Makivvik Corporation (hereafter referred to as Makivvik) wishes to provide comments to the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) on the listing of killer whale and bowhead whale as “Special Concern” under the Canadian Species at Risk Act (SARA) in the hope that these comments will contribute to the board finale decision on this matter. Although the principle focus of this intervention is the rejection of the board’s decision on Northwest Atlantic/Eastern Arctic Orca (Killer Whale), many of the same arguments are also applicable to the rejection of the board’s decision on Eastern Canada-West Greenland Bowhead Whale.

Considerations

First, Makivvik would like to express its agreement with the initial decision of the NMRWB and the underlying reasons for such decisions. Your decisions reflect the knowledge of Inuit hunters and land users who have been seeing more killer whales in the Nunavik Marine Region (NMR) in the past years. On many occasions, Nunavimmiut have expressed their concerns about the potential impacts that an increasing population of killer whale might have on other species, such as the beluga, that are important for the Nunavik communities. The scientific information used for these proposed listing is scarce and outdated and lacking the robustness needed to justify the listing of these two species as “Special Concern” under SARA. For these reasons, we believe that the initial decisions of the NMRWB were the correct decisions given the information currently available.

Makivvik would also like to point out some of the arguments made the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) in its response letter to the NMRWB which we consider problematic.

ECCC mentioned that an increase in observations of killer whales in the NMR and the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR) could be driven by many factors including changes in sighting efforts. It is important to reiterate that the Inuit knowledge cannot be evaluated on the same criteria as the scientific information. The sighting efforts might indeed have changed from past years, as it is now a safety concern for hunter having to be in contact with these animals, but it should not be used as an argument to discredit a knowledge that comes from inhabiting Nunavik land and waters for millennia. Inuit (traditional) knowledge is not based on standardized protocols but rather on a long time-series of observations and knowledge of the territory that is passed on between generations. Indeed, in rejecting the board’s decision for orca and bowhead whale, Makivvik is of the opinion that the Minister did not demonstrate sufficient deference to Inuit Knowledge. In considering the Inuit Knowledge used to support the NMRWB initial decision, the Minister erred by examining Inuit Knowledge through a scientific lens and did not consider it as its own independent and validated line of evidence. Once again, it seems that the federal government will only recognize the validity of Inuit Knowledge when it agrees with the internal scientific recommendations or aligns with popular public opinion.

In reference to the rejection of the NMRWB’s initial decision on the Eastern Canada-West Greenland stock of bowhead whale, it would be prudent for the board and ECCC to remember that Inuit have consistently rejected the scientific abundance estimates as being too low. Indeed, Inuit were forced to stop harvesting bowhead whales when the initial scientific abundance estimates showed that the population was low. Inuit disagreed with this abundance estimate, and later

scientific estimates validated the Inuit observations of much higher bowhead abundance. Inuit Knowledge indicates an increasing bowhead abundance, one that is incompatible with a listing as Special Concern.

Moreover, ECCC expressed that the listing of these two whale species could help address the existing data gaps. We believe that the federal government must not list species under SARA only to gather the necessary information to manage these whales, either by conducting scientific surveys or by interviewing knowledge holders. In fact, it should be the first step if there are concerns about these species rather than requesting the region to work on management plans that will be time consuming and will divert efforts from our limited capacities to work on issues that are of lesser importance in terms of food security and traditional practices.

Recommendation

Considering that this decision from ECCC to reject the NMRWB initial decision is not based on solid nor recent evidence either from the western science or the Inuit knowledge but rather on a precautionary principle that more often than not has affected Inuit rights and way of life in the past, Makivvik would like to support the NMRWB in maintaining their initial decision not to list these two whale species under the Canadian Species at Risk Act.

Conclusion

Makivvik would like to thank the NMRWB for considering our comments regarding the listing of killer whale and bowhead whale as “Special Concern” under the Canadian Species at Risk Act and hope that the ECCC Minister will reconsider his decision and that the Inuit knowledge shared during this process will be given the attention and recognition required under the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement (NILCA), remembering Articles 5.1.3 (f) and (h).