

August 19, 2024

Mr. Iola Metuq  
Chairperson  
Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board  
PO Box 433  
Inukjuak QC J0M 1M0  
[imetuq@nmrwb.ca](mailto:imetuq@nmrwb.ca)  
[tpalliser@nmrwb.ca](mailto:tpalliser@nmrwb.ca)  
[mbasterfield@nmrwb.ca](mailto:mbasterfield@nmrwb.ca)

Dear Mr. Metuq:

Thank you for your correspondence dated June 28, 2024, informing us of the initial decision of the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board to move the northernmost boundary of the Eastern Hudson Bay Arc Region for beluga management.

We have carefully analyzed your initial decision, associated reasons for decision document, and submissions from the public hearing you conducted in Spring, 2024. We appreciate the time and effort the Board, its staff, and all contributing parties have dedicated to this process. It helps to ensure decisions are made based on the best available combination of Inuit Knowledge and science advice.

I wish to inform you that I accept your initial decision to move the northern boundary from its current position along the 59<sup>th</sup> parallel, north of Inukjuak, to the revised position proposed by the regional Anguvigaq. The rationale for my decision is detailed below.

Inukjuamiut Knowledge holders indicate that Inukjuak is along a migration route for multiple, mixed beluga stocks, including Belcher Island - Eastern Hudson Bay (BEL-EHB), Western Hudson Bay, and James Bay beluga. However, we must also consider the research that indicates that the current northern boundary of the Eastern Hudson Bay Total Allowable Take zone is reflective of the summering range of BEL-EHB beluga and that any beluga harvested during summer up to mid-September in the northern portion of the zone are likely to belong to the BEL-EHB stock. While genetic data suggests that at least 50% of harvests in the northern area of the Eastern Hudson Bay Arc Region during fall would consist of BEL-EHB beluga, data is currently lacking to estimate the proportion of BEL-EHB beluga harvested there in spring. The recovery potential assessment, published in 2024, which my staff presented to you at the Board's June meeting, indicates the BEL-EHB population has been steadily declining at a rate of approximately

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3% per year since 2015. My staff and I remain concerned about the potential harvest pressure the boundary change may expose the population to during the fall and spring hunts if the proportion of BEL-EHB beluga landings increase. Therefore we must continue to work together in effectively monitoring the status of the population to ensure its conservation status does not deteriorate and take appropriate management action if it does.

Key to my acceptance was the inclusion of a voluntary closure from July 15 to September 30 annually in the area formerly of the Eastern Hudson Bay Arc Region. I also commend and appreciate the Inukjuak Anguvigaq's commitment to increasing sampling in the area. My staff will share the results with you and the community as soon as possible to build on our collective knowledge and help inform future decisions. The measures proposed by the Anguvigaq are a prime example of community-led wildlife management, and of the Nunavik Inuit Land Claim Agreement objective 5.1.3f, recognizing the value of Nunavik Inuit approaches to wildlife management and Nunavik Inuit knowledge of wildlife habitat and integrating those approaches with knowledge gained through scientific research.

We also recognize that harvesting restrictions around Inukjuak have contributed to hunters having to travel long distances, putting themselves and their equipment at increased risk and reducing opportunities for inter-generational knowledge transfer.

We would like to reaffirm the Department's commitment to working together in the spirit of co-management. We look forward to working with the representatives of the Board, the Anguvigaq and Makivvik in order to sustainably co-manage marine wildlife in the Nunavik Marine Region.

If you have any questions, we encourage you to contact Michael Hale, Regional Senior Fisheries Management Officer, Fisheries and Oceans Canada-Arctic Region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Diane Lebouthillier', with a stylized, flowing script.

The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

CC: Mr. Tommy Palliser, Executive Director, NMRWB  
Mr. Mark Basterfield, Director of Wildlife Management, NMRWB