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EYYOU MARINE REGION WILDLIFE BOARD
CONSEIL DE GESTION DES RESSOURCES
FAUNTIQUES DE LA RÉGION MARINE D'EYYOU
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NMRWB and the EMRWB

2020-2026 Beluga Management Decision – Update - September/October 2020

The 2017-19 Beluga Management Plan has ended and a new management plan needs to be presented for approval from the DFO Minister on how to maximize the Inuit harvesting rights of the Inuit and also putting into place conservation efforts to help conserve the Eastern Hudson Bay (EHB) Beluga in the Nunavik Marine Region. The population of the EHB is estimated to be approximately 3,300. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans considers a species of beluga to be endangered when their population estimates are less than 4,000. Therefore, we need to put in place a management plan to respect the Inuit harvesting rights to hunt beluga, but to also help the conservation efforts of DFO for the Eastern Hudson Bay Beluga. There will be another survey in the near future to update the population estimates, which will be used in future management plans. Due to COVID-19, there are restrictions to conduct the survey properly this year.

Below is the process that the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board and the Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board conducted to come to a final decision for the next management plan in the Nunavik Marine Region and in the Eeyou Marine Region.

Part 1: Process

- The Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) and the Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board (EMRWB) began the process of preparing for new beluga management decisions in late 2019, gathering information and preparing for a public hearing.
- The decision-making process happens together with the Cree of the Eeyou-Istchee, due to the overlapping Nunavik / Cree boundaries in South-Eastern Hudson Bay, where the Eastern Hudson Bay Beluga Stock spend their summers each year.
- In January 2020 the Boards held their public hearing in Kuujjuaraapik, Nunavik, where they were available to hear the information, concerns, and thoughts of all interested parties on for the future of beluga management in Nunavik and the Eeyou-Istchee.
- Parties Included any and all interested Nunavik Inuit and Cree of the Eeyou-Istchee, Makivik, the RNUK (Anguvigaq), the Cree Trappers Association, the LNUKs (Anguviapik), the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO),
- Since the public hearing, the Boards have been silent on the beluga issues: This is due to confidentiality requirements in the land claim. This confidentiality is in place until the Boards' decisions are finalized. This took longer than expected, due to the

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vast amount of information provided at the public hearing, and the importance of the issue.

- The NMRWB and the EMRWB submitted their **initial Decision** on beluga management to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) on **May 27, 2020**, and received a response on **July 28th** indicating that the Minister rejected their decision based on concerns over the ability of the initial decision to protect and conserve the Eastern Hudson Bay beluga population.
- Since then, The Boards have been in a process of reviewing the Minister's concerns and developing a Final Decision.
- The final decision was completed and sent to the minister on **September 28 2020**, and the Boards await a response. We have requested the response come before November, in order to allow for a Fall hunting season.
- In accordance with the Land Claims, the minister may accept the decision, or she may reject or change (vary) the decision. Reasoning must be provided if the minister rejects or changes (varies) the Board decision.

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Part 2: Beluga management decisions

- NMRWB and the EMRWB's decisions were focused on protecting both harvesting rights of the Inuit and conserving the EHB beluga, so Inuit could harvest for generations to come, to respect and promote Inuit beluga management practices, and to minimize the need for Federal regulations.
- After reviewing all the information, the Boards concluded that a balance between conservation and the protection of harvesting rights could best be accomplished with the following measures:

Important! *The following management plan will only take effect if the minister of DFO accepts the NMRWB's final Decisions. Until otherwise advised, beluga hunting in Nunavik is still presently closed by order of DFO.*

- A **Total Allowable Take (TAT)** of **24 beluga per year** where Eastern Hudson Bay beluga (EHB) are most common (near Inukjuak, Umiujaq, and Kuujjuaraapik).
- For the rest of Nunavik, outside of the Hudson Bay Arc, instead of a quota system, **non-quota limitations (NQLs)** will be used to ensure the EHB population is harvested less and more harvesting efforts put on the Western Hudson Bay (WHB) beluga or the James Bay (JB) beluga. These NQL's would need some input from the LNUKs and local hunters on how best to avoid the EHB and maximize harvest of the WHB or JB beluga population.
- There will be a seasonal closure from September 1st to October 31st in Hudson Strait. This is aimed at avoiding harvesting the earlier-migrating East Hudson Bay beluga, and directing harvest effort at the larger Western Hudson Bay migrating stock. The LNUKs of the Hudson Strait may open the hunt when the earlier EHB migration has passed, after October 31st.
- Reporting of harvest and biological sampling will be mandatory at all times. The Nunavik Research Center and DFO will be increasing their capacity and abilities to process more sampling kits. The LNUKs and RNUK will need to work closely with their local hunters to assure the sampling process is done.
- While there is no quota for most of Nunavik, the harvest will continue to be tracked and analyzed on an annual basis to ensure that harvest levels are not putting the Eastern Hudson Bay beluga stock at risk. The Board encourages communities to harvest only what they need.
- *Community / LNUK management*
Under this system, co-management partners will work with the communities and LNUKs to develop local bylaws and regulations to help protect EHB beluga. It is our hope that over the next 5 years, all communities in Nunavik may have their

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own local beluga management systems, reducing the need for regional or federal regulations.

- If this plan is approved, and if the hunters work closely with the LNUKs and RNUK, then we would begin to manage our own beluga management plans similar to what they are doing in Sanikiluaq. They have voluntary seasonal closures where they know when the EHB pass the Sanikiluaq area and then hunt when they know they are not and sample their harvests. They have proven that they can maximize their harvest of beluga and conserving the EHB.
- The areas encompassing Little Whale estuary, Nastapoka estuary, and Mucalic estuary will remain closed to hunting, but will now have the opportunity to be opened for limited harvesting, especially for community based cultural activities. Harvest and Use plans for the areas can be submitted to the NMRWB and EMRWB for consideration, and then forwarded to the minister for approval.
- These decisions would be in place for 5 years, as long as the level of harvest does not put the EHB beluga at risk, at which point new decisions may be required.

****Important!**** *The preceding management measure will only take effect if the minister of DFO accepts the NMRWB's final Decisions. Until otherwise advised, beluga hunting in Nunavut is still closed by order of DFO.*

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