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EYYOU MARINE REGION WILDLIFE BOARD  
CONSEIL DE GESTION DES RESSOURCES  
FAUNIQUES DE LA RÉGION MARINE D'EYYOU  
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# 2022 Beluga Management Annual Review Meeting Summary Report

Produced July 2023

Note: This summary report and all supporting documents were prepared by staff of the NMRWB and EMRWB, from a meeting hosted by both Boards. However, the views expressed within are not intended to reflect those of the Board Members nor any other meeting participants. This is an account of the views expressed during the meeting regardless of affiliation, as interpreted by NMRWB staff.

## Introduction

This is a summary report of the 2022 Beluga Annual Review Meeting held April 11-13, 2022 in Vaudreuil-Dorion, Quebec. It was written more than one year after the meeting took place, and was produced in parallel with the 2023 Beluga Annual Review Meeting report.

The format of this summary report is a brief overview of the agenda, desired outcomes of the meeting, discussion highlights, and a list of action items.

## Attendance

Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board Members  
Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board Staff  
Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board Members  
Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board Staff  
RNUK (Nunavik Hunting Association) members  
RNUK staff  
Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) staff  
Makivvik Staff  
Uumajuit Warden staff

## Agenda

### Day 1: Information Sharing from 2021

1. Welcome, Opening Prayer, Introductions
2. Overview of Schedule
3. Desired Meeting outcomes - presentation and discussion
4. Major Goals, Objectives, and Parameters of the 2021-2026 Beluga management system (NMRWB/EMRWB presentation)
5. Presentations from various parties - 2021 overview and new information
  - 5.1. Recorded Harvest Data (DFO)
  - 5.2. Harvest Sampling (Makivvik)
  - 5.3. Uumajuit Warden Duties, and Challenges
  - 5.4. RNUK presentations
    - 5.4.1. Hudson Bay Arc
    - 5.4.2. Local Hunt Plans and the 2021 hunt
    - 5.4.3. Marralik project
    - 5.4.4. Other / Extra
  - 5.5. DFO science updates
    - 5.5.1. Genetic information
    - 5.5.2. Aerial survey 2021
    - 5.5.3. Population model
  - 5.6. Bylaw development
  - 5.7. Information wrap-up Presentations

5.7.1.2021 parameters overview: TAT, closed seasons, Threshold, etc.

5.7.2.Important considerations from 2021, leading into 2022 (Key harvest management areas, Harvest Strategies)

### **Day 2: Considerations and Strategies for 2022**

6. Moderated Discussion - Performance of beluga management in 2021, and determining high priority issues and discussion topics
7. Small groups - Analysis of topics and solutions
8. Small groups - Analysis of topics and solutions (continued)
9. Summaries of group discussions and solutions - 60 minutes
10. Moderated Discussion - Aiming for success in 2022: Changes to implementation and Roles of co-management partners - 105 minutes

### **Day 3: Strategies and Recommendations for 2022**

11. Moderated Discussion - Aiming for success in 2022: Changes to implementation and Roles of co-management partners + **recommendations** to the Boards - 75 minutes
12. Moderated Wrap-up session - Revisit desired outcomes, list next steps and actions for co-management partners - 90 minutes

### **End of Annual Beluga Management Review**

#### **Desired outcomes for the 2022 beluga management annual review:**

- Common understanding of the 2021 beluga harvest and harvest management
  - Sharing of any new knowledge gained
  - Discussion and consensus on how to improve beluga management implementation in 2022
  - Recommendations to the Boards for changes to the Management system
  - Summary report of the meeting
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## Presentations and Discussion Highlights

### A. Recorded Harvest Data (DFO):

- Management objective: Eastern Hudson Bay whales (EHB) population stable at 3 400 whales after 5 years (2021-2026)
- EHB Potential Biological Removal (PBR): **58** whales/year
- Open all year long (except in Hudson Strait)

#### Discussion

- According to DFO, **2021 December closure was to control beluga harvesting**. This decision came from the Minister, and was not put forward by the Boards. DFO is still analysing the results of this closure. If a management measure is not efficient, it can be changed through Board decision-making.
- **RNUK: there could be less harvest done in the Hudson Strait with no closure measure.** The timing of December closure doesn't make any sense. It has caused confusion amongst the hunters.
- **About DFO's harvest report:** should include a note indicating that the name of a community is used for location of harvest only, not the community the hunter is from. For example, in 2021 PUV contributed to Ivujivik harvest

### B. Harvest Sampling (Makivik)

Sampling kits returned in 2021:

Kuujuuaq: 2

Tasiujaq: 1

Aupaluk: 1

Quaqtaq: 45

Ivujivik: 14

Kangiqsujuaq: 17

Kuujjuarapik: 7

#### Discussions:

- Need of more coordination between Nunavik Research Center and LNUKs.
- Samples should be paid immediately when they are brought to the LNUK by the hunters.
- Need more buy-in from the hunters
- **NMRWB:** importance of getting the 100% of samples
- Communication of results from **sampling is needed**. Should be sent regularly

### C. Uumajuit Warden Duties, and Challenges

**Wardens are employed by Kativik Regional Government** (Renewable resources' department):

- **Funding** comes from an agreement with DFO through the AAROM program (Aboriginal Aquatic Resources and Ocean Management)
- Guardians are certified but don't have the status of officers and **have limited powers**. They are assistants to the DFO or Quebec officers.
- There are 14 guardians' positions, some are certified other are technicians

**Issue with perception and recruitment:**

- KRG explains that hunters have a **negative perception** of the Uumajuit warden (association with DFO). For example in Ivujivik a car was vandalized, and wardens often get threatened.
- About **the future of Uumajuit warden with retirement recruitment**: KRG reports that it is extremely difficult to recruit. Certification is a good incentive. Last certification was in 2018.
- RNUK recognizes that this is not an easy position to be in Uumajuit warden. They need **more visibility in the communities**. They are not well known.

#### D. RNUK presentations

Hudson Bay Arc: The project is to create Eastern Hudson Bay committee. 3 communities are involved. But there is **an issue with beluga overharvesting**. RNUK is working with 2 communities., **RNUK is waiting for an agreement between the communities**.

**Long Island area** project is not sufficient for the knowledge transfer and food security. It is a band aid solution to this problem. **The communities must put the effort before RNUK provide support**.

#### Local Hunt Plans and the 2021 hunt

1. Bylaws development update
  - NMRWB lawyer is involved in the **bylaw's development** with LNUKs
  - 6 communities have drafted their bylaws, 2 communities have their bylaws reviewed
  - Plan is to have these bylaws finished by this summer.
  - Do not foresee a problem with bylaws implementation.
  - RNUK **does not want to impose "policing"**. Bylaws must be implemented on a voluntary basis
  - **NMRWB**: we've been sceptic to rules and regulations that our hunters cannot follow. It will fix itself. **Hunting was destroyed by quota system**. As Inuit we have our own system to manage wildlife. We are not there to eliminate our wildlife.
2. **Money is secured for the LNUK manager position** / First step is training.
3. RNUK and LNUKs **need support from the other co-management organisations**.

#### Marralik project

1. 2021 project results overview: 50 youth, 15 guides, assistant guides, etc. spent 25 days on the field. They observed **32 belugas and took 2 samples**.
2. **This opportunity was also used for transferring knowledge and stimulating the youth interest for Inuit knowledge and western science**. The project expense may look high for the results but the knowledge transfer worth the price.

#### Estuary Hunt plans

1. Kuujjuaq and George River LNUKs **hunt plan applications are ready** to submit.
2. **Last year quota of 20 EHB was taken too fast**. The estuary hunt could not be done. RNUK and LNUK can't afford to support the costs of preparing an estuary plan if the EHB TAT remains. It must be reconsidered in the management plan.
3. RNUK also raised **communications issues between organisations involved in the management plan**. Roles and process must be streamlined.

## E. DFO science updates

### Review of the main bullet points of the Science Advisory Report

Objectives of the peer review (Terms of references under *National Marine Mammal Peer Review Committee (NMMPRC): February 2022, CSAS website*)

- Review the 2021 aerial survey methods and results and estimate the EHB and JB stock abundance.
- Review the population model for EHB beluga and provide advice on sustainable harvest to ensure that the probability of a decline in abundance from **3,400 animals does not exceed 50% during the next five years**, considering the season and area of the hunt, as well as the genetic mixture of stocks.
- Estimate the maximum number of belugas from EHB that can be harvested at various probability of increase over 10 years.
- Determine how harvest composition varies with time within and between seasons using accepted genetics approach.

### **Discussion**

- **RNUK James:** the Board, DFO management and sciences should consider **the issue is a jurisdictional one**. In Nunavik 3 communities have a hard time with their rights to hunt. **Sanikiluaq hunters are treated differently while hunting from the same stock**. This causes frustration.
- **NMRWB:** how much genetic is needed to confirm population? Who makes the decision? For example, eiders within the colony there are clusters, but they are not different populations. No clear answer.

### 2021 Aerial survey

- **DFO science:** during the survey **we note all the observed species** (including killer whales), we didn't observe any killer whales. Survey is when animals **are done with migration**.
- **About possibility of doing boat surveys**, the coastline is difficult, its hard getting close to belugas, and there are bears, not many harbours. It's intriguing. 54,000 animals may migrate along James Bay coast some are staying on Ontario coast. Many genetic questions.
- **Makivik:** have you looked to the **impact to this new correction factor**? Impact of less big groups vs more bigger groups?
- **DFO science:** For **perception correction we only have 2 surveys** 2015 and 2021 start. To evaluate **inter annual variation (impact of the new factor)** we need to do more surveys to be able to do that. Group size in past surveys mean group a bit higher, we didn't see that this year. Past years, few big groups change the mean, but we didn't see these big groups this year.

### Population modelling

**DFO Science: PBR** (Potential biological removal) is used for conservation. If the number harvested is below PBR: Population should increase. If not: declining.

There are 2 scenarios based on survey results:

- From the presentation: The model estimates that harvest levels of **0 and 20 belugas** would be at or above 3400 belugas after 5 and 10 years, respectively.
- In the alternative model run, harvests of **48 and 65 belugas** would be at or above 3,400 belugas after 5 and 10 years, respectively.

The Potential Biological Removal is 5 animals per year assuming a Recovery factor of 0.1

**RNUK:** why is there no **land-based survey**? / **DFO:** a survey done from shore is not considering the same information, and not comparable to the past surveys.

### **Long Island project:**

- **NMRWB:** Cree trappers' association has to be included in the project / Need to include **Hunt costs for wood and gas** during a hunt
- **NMRWB** staff: Have made a **request for funding to Makivik**. Board is waiting for an answer / Need to put together a budget / Green energy implementation
- **NMRWB:** Experienced in cabin building, he works for landholding funding for infrastructure.
- **Makivik:** Makivik construction could not be involved... Behind schedule. Long Island project is not an executive priority / the timeline sea lift is an issue. Are we doing this this Summer? Do we have the authorization? **FUNDING** is not an issue, but who is the crew? We can provide the material.
- **DFO:** **Need to redirect harvest** toward WHB and James Bay belugas amongst the largest populations in the word. Belcher-EHB are not in great shape.
- **EMRWB:** Given the challenges with construction have you considered the **type of construction? Have you considered what mining companies use?** They're not that expensive and Canada has the expertise. They are as polar bear proof as other structures.

## Post Breakout Group Analysis: Issues, Goals and Solutions

### Arc communities

- Support communities hunt Long Island Camp
- Support the Arc communities financially
- Support hunters and better coordination, many different people, better coordination, should be welcomed by other communities, **sharing of food**

### Issues with TAT

- TAT creates tension between communities, triggers **competition and discourages cultural practices of sharing and transfer of knowledge**
- **ACTION: Re-establish EHB** working group
- Support development of **by-laws**, beluga management by Inuit for Inuit.
- Urgent need to develop way to respond to non-compliance in an Inuit way, it's to Inuit to develop the approach and to DFO to respect
- No TAT for Arc communities during Spring
- Need more support with more freezers, in the communities and hunt camps
- No deduction of TAT for this year from last year's harvest: Deduction decrease willingness to comply, and as it was the first year of the plan, there was confusion.
- Looking for **more collaboration** between Nunavik organisations
- What can other comanagers do (Makivik, DFO, NMRWB): coordination needed

### Add tools for beluga surveys and assessment, better integration of Inuit observation

- Look at **new ways of assessing beluga**: land surveys, drones, hydrophones
- Trust is an issue; there is concern that the knowledge will be used as a weapon against Inuit
- Factors impacting beluga beyond just hunting: killer whales, increase number of walrus changing the behavior of the beluga modify migration routes; habitat of the beluga impacted ice condition, increase entrapment; water temperature, currents; shipping, icebreakers; hydro projects (Inukjuak); fiber optic project.

### Closure in Hudson Strait

- **RNUK**: 2021 closure was inappropriate for migration through the Strait. There must be some kind of variation. Quataq only having their main harvest days before the closure. Sampling, it's more misunderstanding. Some believe sampling will just lead to closure and smaller TAT. Work on sampling communication, what positive could come from sampling?
- **NMRWB staff: Need to document migration better**. Adapt closure time to observations (reality)

### Struck and lost

- **RNUK**: where and when the whole issue of struck and lost (S&L) originates from? This will have to be investigated. Is it for a purpose to put more pressure on hunters?

### Enforcement



- **RNUK:** there should be more invitation to the enforcement officers to the Board meeting there are a lot of issues that we can address if we can access the DFO enforcement.

#### Traditional knowledge

- **Makivik:** about the decision process, minister makes the final decision, if minister doesn't consider traditional knowledge, the minister is responsible. There is a distinction between science advice and management decision. However, once science is published it is not open to discussion anymore, therefore the scientific process should have more input from Inuit before the publication step.

#### How can the beluga management system can be improved?

- **DFO:** one of the major changes was to move away from the quota to no quota and shift a **huge load of work on the LNUKs shoulders**. The change is sudden. It makes sense that results are slow because of the burden.

## List of Action Items from 2022 Beluga Annual Review

- Written Report of the meeting (**NMRWB and EMRWB**)
- Request DFO not implement the carry-over of the 2021 arc harvest to 2022 (**NMRWB to send request**)
- Full decision-making process to reconsider the January/February closure in Hudson Strait (**NMRWB**)
- Re-Establish EHB working group (**RNUK, DFO, Makivik**)
- Analyze goals and issues to continue to develop actions (**all organizations**)