



MEETING MINUTES

WMAC (NS) Teleconference
April 15, 2009

Lindsay Staples Chair • **Danny C. Gordon** Inuvialuit Game Council (Member) • **Ernest Pokiak** Inuvialuit Game Council (Member) • **Christian Bucher** Government of Canada (Member) • **Doug Larsen** Yukon Government (Member) • **Michelle Christensen** (Secretariat)

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 12:05pm to discuss the Polar Bear Non-Detrimental Finding and a number of other items.

Polar Bear Non-Detrimental Finding (NDF)

The Chair explained that Environment Canada is leading the development of a national NDF report for polar bear which will determine whether or not continued trade will have a detrimental effect on the species.

The Chair briefly described the three options that Environment Canada (EC) has presented and described how the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (NWT) [WMAC (NWT)] responded. Essentially they were not happy with the options EC presented, so recommended that EC consider revising the three options as proposed by the Council, and did not state a preference for any option.

He hoped the Council could discuss its response to EC's and WMAC (NWT)'s recommended options.

Christian indicated that he had difficulty with EC's options A) and B) because they relate to areas outside of the Council's jurisdiction. He said that option C) does not fully address the Council's concern with the Southern Beaufort population. He favoured WMAC (NWT)'s approach, noting that WMAC (NWT)'s option C) is closest to EC's option B).

The Chair pointed out that WMAC (NWT)'s recommendations emphasize that good systems are in place for polar bear harvest management.

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Doug said although the harvest of the Southern Beaufort population may be legal, climate change is affecting that population, meaning that harvest might not be sustainable.

The Chair said that when COSEWIC designated polar bear as “of special concern” they took climate change into account noting that harvest was not a determining factor in the decline of the population. The 2002 report that they cited showed that the management regime for the Southern Beaufort polar bear was not unsustainable.

Doug said that regardless of species, whatever the driving force behind population decline is, harvest will worsen the situation. The Southern Beaufort population is declining and if export continues then harvest will contribute to the population’s decline.

The Chair said that if we used that argument, then what the Council said to COSEWIC regarding the listing would no longer apply. The Chair cautioned that harvest adjustment is a management tool that should be used at the national level and not deferred to the international community.

Doug expressed that we have an obligation to do what’s best for the population. Although it is better to have quotas set at the national level, he said he would be worried about saying to the international community that harvest is non-detrimental to the population.

The Chair said that as WMAC (NWT) has outlined, it is difficult to imagine how one could improve the instruments already in place, such as the annual harvest review, for managing the Southern Beaufort population.

Ernest said that having agreement between the WMAC’s is important. WMAC (NWT) has vested a lot into management systems and research of the Southern Beaufort population. He also said that the environment is changing and the bears are adapting. He noted that not many hunters are taking bears in Sachs Harbour this winter because hunters cannot export the hide. He emphasized that overharvesting is not a problem.

The Chair quickly explained to Doug, who was absent at the March meeting, Dave Fraser’s presentation on the NDF. What emerged was that the single population approach to the NDF would not be credible internationally.

Christian noted that no matter what position the Council takes, any CITES authority can challenge it. He agreed that the single population approach is not an option.

The Chair suggested deferring the conversation about overharvest for another day considering that COSEWIC has identified overharvest as a threat only in the Kane Basin and Baffin Bay populations.

Christian said that the Southern Beaufort is impacted by climate change, which, de facto is to say that continued export is a detriment to the population.

Doug said he is convinced that the population is declining because of climate change and because of information Ramona Maraj has brought forward, as well as the fact that the US has listed the Southern Beaufort population in Alaska as endangered. He wondered how we could say that harvest is not detrimental to a population that is declining.

The Chair said that the NDF will be affected by the process that guides management. He clarified that the US “threatened” designation allows for the continued harvest for Alaskan residents. The reason for the export ban from Canada was a function of a regulation under the Marine Mammals Protection Act, which is currently under legal challenge as applied to the Southern Beaufort population. Exemptions are already being investigated for oil and gas activity.

He explained that the COSEWIC report flags that the Southern Beaufort population is likely in decline which management processes must address. It also notes that climate change is the driving factor. He expressed concern that support for the NDF will come before Canada has the opportunity to work on harvest management issues on its own. He suggested supporting the option that would address the export ban which would leave the issue of harvest management to Canada to sort out.

Christian said he was concerned about the justification that would have to be provided for the NDF, stating that Canada may not be ready to do that at this point.

The Chair said that he is aware of upcoming reviews, for example the Inupiat-Inuvialuit harvest review, and the Alaskan assessment which is currently under review, but stressed that the COSEWIC report notes the importance in looking forward not just reviewing what’s been done.

Doug pointed out at the last Polar Bear Technical Committee meeting that the science behind defining sustainable harvest is not very strong, and different jurisdictions have different ideas on what is sustainable. Harvest management needs to better incorporate other factors such as changing sea ice, etc.

Ernest said that the NWT is not yet concerned about a decline and has not yet talked about adjusting the polar bear quota.

The Chair summarized that the Council would not support any of EC’s options. Rather, they would be interested in supporting the export of legally obtained polar bears from the Beaufort population for a set of reasons that the Chair offered to develop further.

He suggested that the Council may also want to add that as the management regime moves forward, it is important for those engaged in management to look at the impacts of climate change. These are difficult issues. He commented that the Southern Beaufort population is managed very vigilantly.

The Council agreed with the proposed response to Environment Canada regarding the NDF and the Chair said he would circulate a letter by Monday April 20th.

North Slope Conference

The Secretariat outlined a proposal for the North Slope Conference 2010 and asked for the Council's endorsement.

She proposed that the conference be held in Whitehorse, to best accommodate travelers from the NWT and possibly Nunavut, as well as to keep costs down given a limited budget. The Westmark was the venue at the last conference and would be suitable again. February 10th - 12th would work well in terms of other events going on, and in terms of scheduling convenient plane travel.

The Council agreed with the proposal.

The Chair explained his ideas around a theme. This year is the 25th Anniversary of the signing of the IFA and will be the 22nd year of operation for WMAC (NS). The theme could focus on challenges facing co-management on the North Slope and other Canadian arctic jurisdictions. We could take stock of what lessons have been learned, what the emerging issues are, and necessary initiatives and approaches for addressing them.

The Chair said at the Polar Bear Round Table meeting in Winnipeg it occurred to him that past conferences have not had much participation from the eastern Arctic. The issues we work on and the way we approach them are different, but their work on some policy issues in many ways is more advanced than ours.

Ernest suggested involving Alaskan Inupiat as well. The Chair remembered that at previous conferences folks were recruited from the North Slope Borough.

Ernest commented that having one voice across the North is something to strive for.

The Chair suggested coming to the Council for further discussion once ideas are further developed. Members agreed.

Summer Meeting

The Secretariat said that meeting dates that were set for June would no longer work and suggested moving the meeting to Whitehorse for June 6-8, 2009.

All members agreed. The Secretariat said she would follow up with more details.

The Chair thanked everyone for their time and adjourned the meeting at 1:00pm.

Motion 04-09-01

Motion to adjourn the meeting.

Moved: Ernest Pokiak

Second: Danny

Motion carried