

Response Statement - Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic - Baffin Bay population

January 10, 2022

Common Name: Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic - Baffin Bay population

Scientific Name: *Delphinapterus leucas*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Special Concern

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: On 2021-10-12, the Minister of the Environment received the COSEWIC assessment of the Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic - Baffin Bay population as Special Concern. Within 36 months of this date, the Minister will seek to obtain a Governor in Council decision on whether or not to amend the List for this species, or whether to refer the matter back to COSEWIC for further information or consideration. A summary of the consultations and an analysis of why the order is appropriate will be provided. During the extended consultation period, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake consultations with the government of Nunavut, Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, and the public on whether or not the Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic - Baffin Bay population should be added to the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* (Schedule 1) under the *Species at Risk Act* as Special Concern, or whether the matter should be referred back to COSEWIC. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of the Environment will also consult with the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB).

Once a species has been assessed by COSEWIC, further steps must be undertaken before it is added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. For more information on this process, please view [The Species Listing Process Under SARA](#).

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: This population was overexploited in the past, with consequent substantial decline (probably >50%). However, harvests are now likely sustainable and the population appears to have stabilized and may be growing. There is concern that increased vessel traffic facilitated by climate change is changing the nature of the acoustic habitat of this population. The population may fit, or is close to fitting, the criteria for Threatened.

Occurrence: Nunavut, Arctic Ocean

Competent Minister(s):

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency

Province(s) and territory (territories) to be consulted:

Nunavut

Other applicable legislation: *Fisheries Act* and the *Marine Mammal Regulations*, made under that Act. When the species is found within national parks of Canada or other lands administered by the Parks Canada Agency, it is protected or managed under the *Canada National Parks Act* or through measures or management tools available to the Parks Canada Agency under other legislation.

Conservation activities underway: In 2020, the Joint Working Group (JWG) under the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission - Joint Commission on Beluga and Narwhal separated the West Greenland component of the Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay Beluga Whale population into two new units: a re-defined “West Greenland” stock and a proposed new “North Water” stock. The JWG assessed both areas and identified an annual landed catch for each with the objective of maintaining a 70% probability of population increase.