

## **Backgrounder: Western Hudson Bay TAH Increase October, 2011**

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On October 28, 2011 the Honourable Daniel Shewchuk, Minister of Environment announced an increase in the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) for the 2011-2012 harvest year for polar bears in the Western Hudson Bay subpopulation (WH). Consistent with the Department of Environment's management recommendation, which was supported by the Regional Wildlife Organization (RWO), the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) decided to increase the quota from 8 to 21 bears.

### **Background**

In 2005, new Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) came into effect for the management of each of Nunavut's polar bear subpopulations.

In 2007, the GN accepted a decision of the NWMB to reduce the TAH in WH from 56 to 38 polar bears for the 2007/08 season.

The Canadian Wildlife Service released scientific information on WH that indicated a decline in the population due to overharvesting, and progressive sea-ice reduction, causing reductions to polar bear survival and recruitment rates.

### **Polar Bear total allowable harvest:**

#### **Western Hudson Bay seasonal history:**

2006 -07	56
2007-08	38
2008-09	8
2009-10	8
2010-11	8
2011-12	21

In light of this information the Nunavut annual TAH for WH was reduced to 8 polar bears for the 2008/09 season. The TAH of 8 was to remain in place until new information on the state of WH polar bear population became available or until the NWMB reviewed the situation.

The Department of Environment and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated have consulted extensively with Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs) in the WH Bay area to collect Inuit knowledge about the polar bear population. Current and historical information from Nunavut hunters continue to indicate an increase in bear numbers. Based on observations of polar bear abundance and body condition, there is widespread agreement among community members that the polar bear population is healthy and increasing.

### **NWMB Decision**

In absence of an up-to-date science-based population estimate, the NWMB decision to increase the TAH for the 2011-2012 year is based on highly corroborated Inuit

observations of plentiful polar bears in WH. In addition, preliminary results from the WH aerial survey did not contradict these Inuit observations.

The Department of Environment recommended that the NWMB set a new sustainable harvest level of the current population. This works out to 42 polar bears for the 2011-2012 harvest year. Of the 42, 4 are expected to be harvested by Manitoba in Churchill as part of their polar bear deterrent program, based on historic removal numbers. That leaves 38 for Nunavut. Seventeen of these will be used to reconcile over-harvest from previous years, leaving an actual TAH of 21 for the WH communities for 2011/12 harvest season. Pursuant to the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, it is the role of the RWO to allocate the TAH among the communities.

### **Future TAH Decisions**

Data from the 2010-2011 aerial survey population study is currently being analyzed, and results are expected this winter. Harvest decisions for 2012-2013 and beyond will have the benefit of an updated scientific population estimate, which will be considered together with Inuit knowledge.