



To
Ministry of Environment and Nature
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Standing Non-Detriment findings for exports from Greenland of products derived from beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*)

As is required under Article IV, Paragraph 2 of CITES, any export permit shall only be granted when the Scientific Authority of the State of export has advised that such export will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

In determining the extent that harvesting of belugas in Greenland waters for trade is potentially impacting natural populations, the following has been considered:

Belugas in Greenland

Belugas only occur regularly in West Greenland where two stocks are tentatively recognized. Both stocks are shared with Canada.

One stock is found mainly in winter and spring in Northwest Greenland and is only harvested at low levels (<20 whales per year) by hunters from the municipality of Qaanaaq. The stock is considered to be large and the harvest is considered sustainable.

The other stock migrates south along West Greenland in early fall and winters in the area from Uummannaq and south to Maniitsoq. This stock moves north towards the Canadian high Arctic in May. The West Greenland stock is subject to relatively large catches and will be the focus of this document.

Potential causes of natural mortality include predation by killer whales and perhaps Greenland sharks, as well as ice entrapments. Predation levels are believed to be low. In contrast, ice entrapments can result in the death of large numbers of belugas. However, due to increasingly warm winters, ice entrapments have become rare in Greenland - the last reported ice entrapment occurred in 1991.

Management

The current executive order dealing with protection and hunting of belugas was adopted in March 2004, allowing the Home Rule Government to set quotas. The quota and harvest are monitored by the municipal authorities and by the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture through a licence and reporting system. In addition, wildlife officers perform random checks along hunting areas.

Hunters report their catch by filling a form for each beluga taken. This form contains biological information, as well as information about the licence and the hunter. Hunters have to deliver catch reports to the municipal authorities in order to sell the products of their hunt and to obtain a new licence. Besides the specific report for each beluga caught, once a year all hunters have to report monthly catches of all species, including belugas. This yearly reports are mandatory in order to renew the hunting permits.

International management advice is given by The Canada/Greenland Joint Commission on Conservation and Management of Narwhal and Beluga (JCNB). The scientific advice for JCNB on harvest sustainability is provided by a Joint Working Group (JWG) of the Scientific Working Group of JCNB and a Working Group from the Scientific Committee of the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO). The JWG meets on a regular basis - approximately every two years - to discuss beluga and narwhal stock status, to perform stock assessments, and to develop joint recommendations for management. JCNB meets approximately 4 months after the JWG.

Quotas are based on management recommendations from JCNB and on advice from the Hunting Council, which includes representatives from the Organization of Fishermen and Hunters (KNAPK), the Organization of Leisure Hunters (TPAK) and the Greenland Association of Municipalities (KANUKOKA).

Quotas are proposed by the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture and adopted by the Cabinet. Thereafter, this ministry divides the quota among the relevant municipalities. The municipal authorities distribute the quota among the different settlements and individual hunters. It is the responsibility of the municipal authority to stop the harvest once the quota has been reached. Any excess catches and illegal captures are subtracted from the municipal quota the following year. Failure to comply with the executive order can result in confiscation of catch and equipment and fine.

Biological advice

During the 10 year period previous to the introduction of quotas (1994 - 2003), a yearly average of 577 belugas were caught in West Greenland¹. The catches were considered unsustainable, and the JWG estimated in 2001 that the population in the West Greenland area in winter was depleted to less than 25% of its abundance in 1950s. This conclusion was based on analysis of hunting statistics and on seven aerial surveys carried out between 1981 and 1999.

In 2001 the JWG estimated that the total sustainable removal was 100 belugas per year, and provided with a 10 year advice consisting on multiple scenarios, most of which consisted on a gradual reduction of catches until reaching the recommended level of 100 belugas per year. Each scenario was associated with a probability of halting the decline by the year 2011. In 2005 the JWG renewed its recommendation of a total sustainable removal of no more than 100 beluga per year. In 2001, 2004 and 2006, JCNB asked Greenland to take steps to halt the decline observed in West Greenland belugas by reducing catches to a level of 100 per year. The subsequent reduction of catches is described below.

In 2006, the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources conducted another large-scale survey for belugas in West Greenland. Due to the ice edge being further offshore and further north than in previous surveys, the survey from 2006 covered a larger area that included the same index area as in previous surveys, plus areas further west and north. There was a decline in the number of belugas in the index area, but if the larger area was assumed comparable with the index area in the previous survey years,

¹ Source: Heide-Jørgensen, M.P. 2005. Catch statistics for belugas in Greenland 1862 to 2004. NAMMCO/SC/13-JCNB/SWG/2005-JWG/7

then no further reduction could be detected. Based on this survey and in other available data, it is expected that the JWG will provide new management advice during its next meeting, scheduled for the fall 2008.

Recent harvest levels

Since the introduction of quotas in 2004, the Greenland Home Rule Government has followed a policy of gradual reduction of beluga quotas. The quotas have been reduced gradually in order to allow hunters to adapt to increasing restrictions on the harvest of several key species. In June 2007, the Cabinet requested that the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture prepares a three year quota plan for the period 2008 – 2011, which should result in a gradual reduction until the harvest levels recommended by JCNB in 2006 are implemented. The three year quota plan should be finished by April 2008, and implemented from July the same year.

During the three completed seasons after the implementation of the quota system, several municipalities have not been able to catch their whole quotas. According to the hunters, this is due to the weather conditions experienced during the last years, when the winter ice edge where the belugas are found has been further north and further offshore than previously. As a result, the actual catches have been lower than the quotas. Table 1 shows the quotas and the catches in West Greenland and Qaanaaq.

Table 1. Quotas and catches of belugas in Greenland during the complete quota years since the quotas were implemented (2004-2007) and quotas of the current quota year (2007-2008). Catches of belugas of the West Greenland stock for the calendar years 2001, 2002 and 2003 were 452, 419 and 369, respectively. Source: Greenland Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture, Piniarneq database (catches) and press releases (quotas).

	July 2004 – June 2005		July 2005 – June 2006		July 2006 – June 2007		July 2007– June 2008	
Stock	Quota	Catch	Quota	Catch	Quota	Catch	Quota	Catch
West Gl.	300	89	200	150	150	144	145	--
Qaanaaq	20	2	20	1	20	12	20	--

Trade and Export

Trade products from beluga are mattak (skin with blubber), meat and teeth. Meat and mattak are part of the traditional Inuit diet, while teeth are used to make jewellery items, such as earrings and necklaces. This jewellery is used by Greenlanders and sold to tourists in handcraft shops.

One beluga has 34 – 40 teeth. A pair of earrings made of beluga teeth costs approximately 200 DKK (28 USD, or 36 €). This price includes the profit made by the shop and the profit made by the artist. The price obtained by the hunter varies, but is much lower than 100 DKK per teeth.

International trade with beluga products is regulated by an executive order adopted in 2004. Export of parts and products originating from belugas require a CITES-export permit. The Ministry of Environment and Nature manages the CITES-export permits and keeps records of the number of permits issued.

CITES-export permits can be obtained in handcraft shops selling beluga teeth and jewellery made with beluga teeth. Handouts and posters informing about CITES-export permits are displayed in all handcraft shops and other places frequented by tourists. During 2003, 2004 and 2005, respectively, 123, 212 and 139 CITES-export permits were issued for beluga teeth and jewellery containing beluga teeth.

Meat and mattak are consumed mostly in Greenland. However, some mattak is exported for consumption by the Greenland community in Denmark. Most of the export to Denmark is arranged by “Royal Arctic Line”, a company owned by the Greenland Home Rule Government. Two CITES-export permits for meat and mattak were issued in 2003, one in 2004 and one in 2005.

Conclusions on non-detrimental findings for export

Considering that:

- Beluga quotas have been subject to a gradual reduction and the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture has announced that a 3 year quota plan will be implemented in 2008, with the aim of catches equalling the biological advice by 2010.
- Actual catches have been considerably lower than the quotas.
- In contrast to surveys carried out during the 1980s and 1990s, which revealed dramatic declines in the numbers of belugas, the survey of 2006 did not provide with clear signs of a dramatic decline in abundance.
- The number of CITES permits issued suggest that teeth used in international trade originate from a relatively small number of belugas
- Trade of beluga teeth is not a profitable business for a hunter, since extracting and cleaning teeth require considerable effort and the price per tooth is relatively low.

It is concluded that the international trade in beluga products is NOT detrimental to the beluga population in West Greenland.

The sustainability of the beluga harvest in Greenland depends on the continuation of the current trend of catch reduction during the coming years.

It is important to notice that new biological advice for the management of beluga harvest should be available in late 2008.

Yours sincerely

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