



Brief on: Areas with walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*) haul-out sites,
concerning operations related to mineral activities

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Areas with walrus haul-out sites

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Background

The document *Rules for field work and reporting regarding mineral resources* ('Field Rules') (Anon., 2000) provides special provisions for field work related to mineral activities. The provisions are applied to activities within areas and periods of particular significance to wildlife.

The areas and provisions in the Field Rules are defined based on the existing biological knowledge of the time. Government of Greenland has requested a revision of Field Rules' chapter 2 and 3 including report and digital map to be available in NatureMap at www.eamra.gl (naturemap.eamra.gl). NatureMap is an online mapping portal for environment and nature of Greenland. Information from NatureMap can be viewed in NunaGIS and GovMin (Licence-Map) as direct data link service.

This brief is an update to the text of chapter 2 *Areas and periods of particular significance to wildlife* as a provision to section 2.03.09 based on the existing biological knowledge of haul-out sites for Atlantic walrus.

Ad. 1: General description and sensitivity

The Greenland population of Atlantic walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*) on the national Red List is assessed as mainly ‘*Vulnerable*’ (VU), with the north-eastern stock assessed as ‘*Near threatened*’ (NT) (Boertmann & Bay, 2018).

Walrus on land and haul-out sites are fully protected under the Executive order of Greenland Home Rule no. 20 of 27th October 2006 §2, (Anon., 2006). The executive order is currently under revision and is expected to add that it is not allowed to generate disturbances and other traffic within 300 m of walrus on land or haul-out sites. Special regulations apply to the nature reserve of Melville Bay (Anon., 1998) and the National Park of North and North-East Greenland (Anon., 1992).

Walrus is sensitive to anthropogenic disturbance. On land, they can be disturbed from movements and noise by vessels and aircrafts. In the approach zone and in their primary foraging area in shallow water (0-100 m depth), they can be disturbed by vessels. Studies from Svalbard and Canada conclude that passing by also small boats and landings of persons are disturbing to walrus (DFO, 2019).

Greenland has three populations of walrus. North-East Greenland has a small endemic population. West Greenland shares two populations with Canada: the Hudson Bay - Davis Strait population in Central Arctic and the Baffin Bay (Avannata Imaa) population in High Arctic (Garde & Hansen, 2021).

Historical records indicate that the walrus populations were large in the Baffin Bay region and East Greenland c 100 years ago, and thus haul-out sites were more numerous than today. High catches during history have caused a decline of populations and area of distribution, and in the number of active haul-out sites. Recent decades’ quotas on catch and the protection zone of the national park in North and North-East Greenland have slightly increased the sizes of the three populations (NAMMCO, 2018).

Walrus haul-out on sea ice in long periods of the year. Due to the decline of sea ice extent and change of ice characteristics, the use of terrestrial haul-out sites could become increasingly important. For Svalbard and Canada, it is recorded that previously abandoned terrestrial haul-out sites and haul-out regions are now active again (Kovacs et al, 2014). Interviews with hunters in Greenland reveal that abandoned haul-out sites are used again, however infrequently (Born et al., 2017). It is thus advised to include previously abandoned sites, with a notation of the current infrequent use of haul-out site. Abandoned sites near the Hudson Bay – Davis Strait and Baffin Bay populations have been considered relevant due to the proximity to core areas of the populations.

Walrus approach the terrestrial haul-out sites from sea and rest on rocks or beaches within approximately 300 m from the coast (Salter, 1979). In some regions, walrus may haul-out on nearby sea ice.

Ad. 2: Periods of importance

In the Field Rules (November 2000) the following periods are listed:

1. During the period July 15 - October 1, the activities indicated in section 2.02.01 within 500 m from the haul-out site are subject to BMP's approval.

It is advised not to change the periods.

Ad. 3: Areas of importance

The number of known, active terrestrial haul-out sites has declined, possibly due to disturbances and hunting. Occasionally, walrus haul-out on new or previously abandoned places, which are included in the revision of the map. The maps in this document display the haul-out sites as point locations, but in the online digital version the sites are delineated as polygons. It is advised to conduct more detailed observation and terrain analysis for more specific delineation.

Please note that haul-out sites and derived protection zones refer to the map “GTK 1:250.000 vector” (<https://dataforsyningen.dk/data/985>), which is known to be inaccurate of up to 100-1000 meters in many areas. A new topographical map of Greenland is currently under production, and once released, it is recommended that the geographical information of sites referenced in “GTK 1:250.000 vector” should be validated. The site delineations have been validated against the preliminary orthophoto released by the mapping agency.

It is advised to change the regulations of the section in the field rules to the following:

2.03.09 Walrus haul-out sites. During the period July 15 – October 1, the following regulations apply in proximity to a terrestrial or sea ice haul-out site for walrus, unless approved by the Environmental Agency for Mineral Resources and Activities:

- a) It is not allowed to cause disturbance, including firing guns or traveling by boat at speeds above 3 knots, within a distance of 2000 meters.*
- b) It is not allowed to fly by fixed-wing plane or helicopter within a vertical distance of 500 meters and horizontal distance of 2000 meters.*
- c) It is not allowed to fly drones within a vertical or horizontal distance of 100 meters.*
- d) Traffic and going ashore are not allowed on walrus haul-out sites.*

List of known, active terrestrial haul-out sites:

In the North-East Greenland National Park:

Kilen

Lynn Ø

Lille Snenæs

Kap Bjarne Nielsen

Andreas Lundager Ø

Kap Carl Ritter

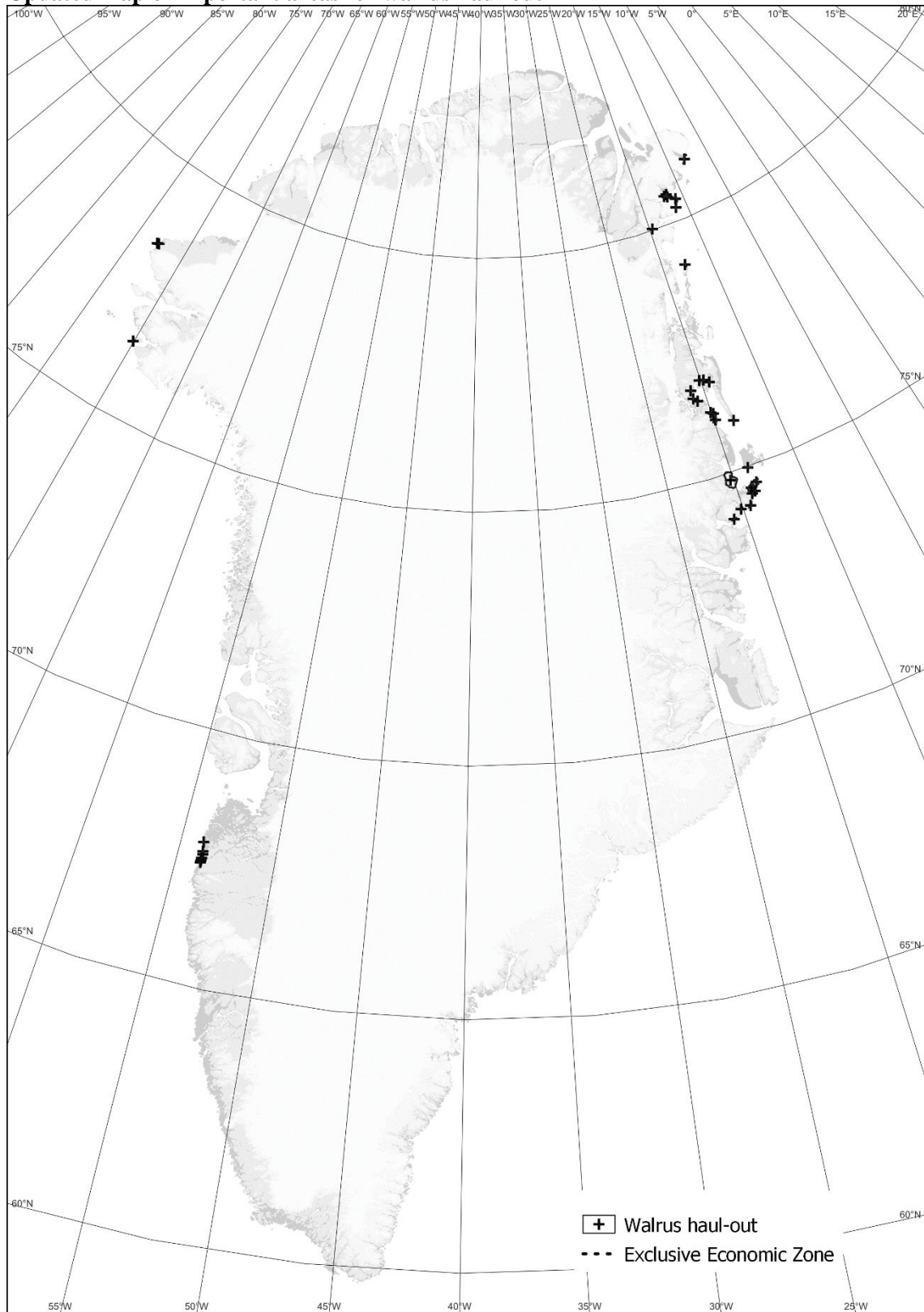
Kap Tramnitz

Sandøen

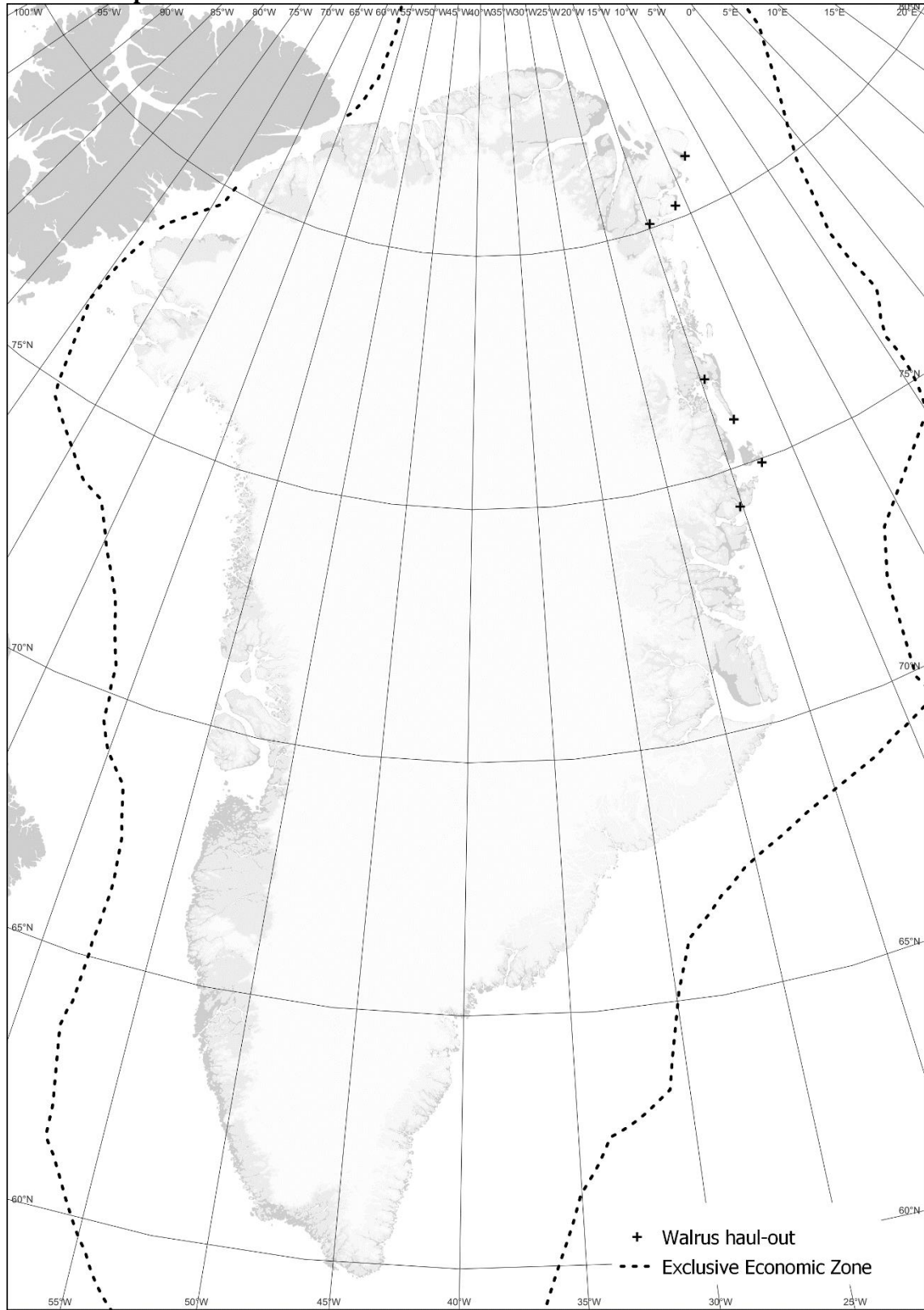
In Avannaata Kommunia:

Edderfugleøer near Pituffik

Updated map of important areas for walrus haul-out



Previous map of areas with walrus haul-out sites



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