



Beluga Whale (Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population)

Consultations on listing under the *Species at Risk Act*

Information summary and [survey for the consultations](#) on potentially adding Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay, to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as Special Concern – **Please provide input by December 22, 2023**

Consultations

Let your opinion be heard

Canada's *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* provides legal protection for wildlife species at risk to conserve biological diversity. It also acknowledges that all Canadians have a role to play in the conservation of wildlife species.

Before deciding whether Beluga Whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*), Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population, will be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, we would like to hear your opinion, comments, and suggestions regarding the possible ecological, cultural, and economic impacts of listing or not listing this species under *SARA*.

Adding a population to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk...

The process of listing a species under Canada's *SARA* consists of several steps: it begins with a status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and ends with a Government of Canada decision on whether or not to add a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. Public consultations are also conducted to gather the opinions of Canadians and are an important step in this process.

Facts about Beluga Whale

Beluga Whales are toothed whales (odontocetes) with a rounded head, broad flippers, and no dorsal

fin (Figure 1). Newborn Belugas are dark grey or brown and become lighter with age. Transition to uniformly white occurs at 10-20 years of age.

Belugas are about 1.5 m long at birth, and adult lengths range from 2.6 to 4.5 m depending on the population, with adult females being approximately 80% the length of adult males.

Beluga Whales have long been a major nutritional and cultural resource for Indigenous (primarily Inuit) communities in many parts of the Arctic and sub-Arctic. Human settlement patterns were influenced, to some extent, by the seasonal availability of Belugas for hunting.

Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) and Polar Bears (*Ursus maritimus*) are the only non-human predators of Belugas.

The Eastern High Arctic – West Greenland Beluga Whale resides in the North Water Polynya in the winter and disperses to summer in either central Arctic Canada or western Greenland (Figure 2).

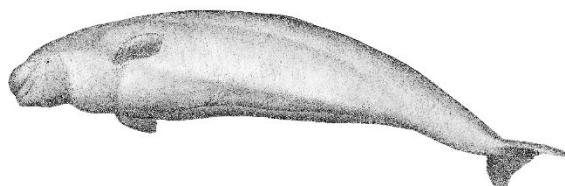


Figure 1. Beluga Whale (©Gerald Kuehl, 2000).

Aquatic Species at Risk

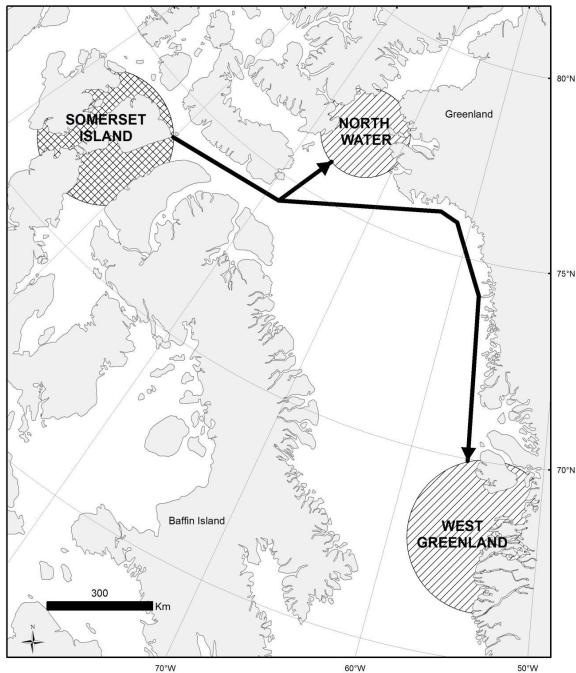


Figure 2. General distribution of the Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay Beluga Whale showing the assumed migratory routes from the overwintering site in the North Water Polynya to the core summering areas around Somerset Island and western Greenland (from COSEWIC 2020).

Who assigned the Special Concern status to Beluga Whale?

COSEWIC is an independent committee of experts that assesses and designates which wildlife species are in some danger of disappearing from Canada and assigns these species a status. It conducts its' assessments based on the best available information including scientific data, local ecological knowledge, and Indigenous traditional knowledge. COSEWIC assessed the status of all Beluga Whale populations in Canada in November 2020.

Why is Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population, at risk?

COSEWIC concluded that 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.

If a species is listed under the *Species at Risk Act*...
If Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population is listed, none of the potential prohibitions of SARA would apply and a sustainable Inuit harvest could continue. However, listing would result in the development of a SARA management plan that will include conservation measures for the species.

We would like to receive your comments on the potential impacts of adding or not adding the Beluga Whale, Eastern High Arctic – Baffin Bay population, to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA as Special Concern.

Your comments are important.

Please [fill out the questionnaire](#): we want to hear from you.

A copy of the 2020 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Beluga Whale and other information can be found on the SARA Registry at www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

References

COSEWIC. 2020. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Beluga Whale *Delphinapterus leucas*, Eastern High Arctic - Baffin Bay population, Cumberland Sound population, Ungava Bay population, Western Hudson Bay population, Eastern Hudson Bay population and James Bay population in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xxxv + 84 pp. (www.sararegistry.gc.ca)

