

Consultation Guide

Polar Bear Management Plan for Québec, the Eeyou Marine Region and the Nunavik Marine Region



Nunavik

Contact Information for Members of the Consultation Group

Primary Contact:

Gregor Gilbert

Senior Resource Development Department Coordinator
Makivik Corporation – Resource Development Department
(514) 745-8880
ggilbert@makivik.org

Other Members:

Mark O'Connor

Resource Development Coordinator
Makivik Corporation – Resource Development Department
(514) 745-8880
moconnor@makivik.org

Jimmy Johannes

Executive Secretary
NHFTA / RNUK
(819) 964-0645
secretary@rnuk.ca

Peter Hale

Environment and Climate Change Canada
(819) 938-3933
peter.hale@canada.ca

Guillaume Szor

Biologiste, MSc
Direction de la gestion de la faune du Nord-du-Québec
Ministère des Forêts de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP)
(418) 748-7701 ext. 238
guillaume.szor@mffp.gouv.qc.ca

Section 1: Introduction

Context

For as long as Inuit and Cree have inhabited the coastal region of Northern Québec (Nunavik and Eeyou Istchee) polar bears (*Nanuq* in Inuktitut, *Whabhskewh* in Cree) have been an important part of their cultures and livelihood. Inuit have used polar bear for food and clothing for millennia; the Crees of Eeyou Istchee, although less reliant on polar bear than the Inuit, also place a high value on polar bears as socio-cultural symbols. Accompanying these traditional usages and views have been traditional harvest management practices that largely remain in place to this day.

On January 10, 2012, the Federal Minister of the Environment requested that the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) establish a management regime, including a Total Allowable Take (TAT), for the three sub-populations of polar bear that occur in the Nunavik Marine Region (NMR). Given the distribution of polar bears and the jurisdictional complexities of Northern Quebec, it is desirable and practical to have a single management plan that applies to both the onshore portion of Quebec and its adjacent marine regions (the Nunavik Marine Region and the Eeyou Marine Region). This plan is therefore intended to encompass the territories covered under three Land Claims Agreements; the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA), the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement (NILCA) and the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement (EMRLCA); it will not apply beyond the boundaries defined in these Agreements (see Figure 1).

Process

One of the key objectives of all parties involved in the development of this plan is for the QC-EMR-NMR Polar Bear Management Plan to reflect the knowledge, concerns, traditions and principles of the people most affected by it: the Inuit of Nunavik and the Crees of Eeyou Istchee.

In order to attain this objective, members of the Quebec – Eeyou Marine Region – Nunavik Marine Region Polar Bear Management Plan Working Group will visit every Nunavik community to ensure that Inuit have been given an opportunity to share their views and knowledge about polar bear management. A separate process will be held in the Cree region.

Recognizing that it would be inappropriate to arrive in communities with a finished product, it was decided from the start that the first draft would be no more than an overview of the legal context within which this plan will operate and of the existing knowledge on polar bears, their habitat and the threats they face (based on both science and traditional knowledge). Communities will therefore have a meaningful opportunity to shape the management decisions and processes that flow from the Plan.

“the QC-EMR-NMR Polar Bear Management Plan (must) reflect the knowledge, concerns, traditions and principles of the people most affected by it: the Inuit of Nunavik and the Crees of Eeyou Istchee”

Section 2: What is in a Management Plan?

Contrary to popular belief, management plans are not just a list of all the regulations and harvest limits that apply to a particular species. Rather, they describe the biology of a species, explain how it has been used and managed and the legal context within which it is managed. More importantly, management plans identify any threats and concerns related to the species and establish a framework within which a suite of short-, medium- and long-term actions to address these conservation issues are to be implemented. Although they are sometimes included within these actions, quotas and other harvest limitations will not be included within the present management plan since such decisions must be made in a separate process and in accordance with the processes outlined in the NILCA, EMRLCA and JBNQA.

“Management plans are not just a list of all the regulations and harvest limits that apply to a particular species.”

Section 3: The Community Consultation Process in Nunavik

The consultation team that will visit each community will consist of representatives from organizations involved in the development of this management plan (i.e. RNUK, Makivik, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Quebec Government).

Prior to the consultation tour, key local organizations (Northern Villages, Landholding Corporations, and LNUKs) will be contacted to make necessary arrangements in preparation for the consultation. Depending on the size of the community and how much they rely on polar bears, the consultation team will spend 2-3 days in each community as follows (Inuktitut interpretation will be available throughout):

- Upon arrival the group will meet with key local organizations and any key elders and/or hunters that have been identified by the community. This meeting will be an opportunity to discuss the intent of their visit, the management plan itself and listen to the community's main concerns;
- The group will then continue meeting with the LNUK to discuss the details of the public consultation and prepare logistics;
- If time permits group members will also attempt to visit local schools and the FM station;
- A public session will be held for all community members to express their knowledge, concerns and recommendations on the polar bear management plan;
- Attempts will be made to reach key Elders who were not able to partake in the public meeting;
- Before leaving the community, the group will reconvene with the LNUK to ensure that it has taken the correct messages away from the public meeting and that the views of their constituents have been accurately recorded.
- Once all community consultations have been completed, a report summarizing the input of Nunavik Inuit will be prepared and shared with all communities.
- The information gathered through this consultation process will be integrated into the Polar Bear Management Plan before it is submitted to the approval process.

Section 4: Questions to develop the polar bear management plan

The questions that follow have been developed to guide discussions during the public consultations as well as to help ensure that community members and organizations are prepared for these events and that their input will provide the information necessary to complete the management plan.

Please note that these questions may not all be specifically raised during the consultations, but are provided here to encourage discussion. We encourage anyone who wishes to submit written answers to these questions to do so; their responses can be sent to the primary contact person, identified at the beginning of this document.

Fundamental Questions about the plan:

- We have tentatively proposed four main objectives for the polar bear management plan as follows (more information about each one of these is presented in the Draft Management Plan):
 1. Developing an adaptive co-management system that ensures the long-term maintenance of vital, healthy polar bear subpopulations capable of sustaining harvesting needs, and preserves the ability to export polar bear products.
 2. Gathering traditional and scientific knowledge of polar bears on a regular basis in order to inform management decisions.
 3. Encouraging wise-use and stewardship of polar bears.
 4. Establishing strategies to minimize the effects of human activities on polar bears and their habitat.
- Do you disagree with any of these objectives?
- Do you feel that this set of objectives will lead to a good polar bear management plan?
- Which aspects of Inuit values and wildlife management principles are particularly important and must be integrated in the management plan? In other words, how do Inuit deal with wildlife differently from other people?
 - o How does this help to maintain wildlife populations?

Questions related to Objective 1: Establish a management system based on the best available information, and adapt it as necessary, in order to ensure the long-term persistence of healthy polar bears in the management plan area.

- What factors affect the number of bears that a hunter can harvest in the course of the year?
- Is it important to maintain the right to sell polar bear skins to the international market?
- Based on Inuit Knowledge, are there any specific polar bear hunting rules that should be included in this management plan?
- What do you know about the polar bear hunting regulations contained in the 1984 Agreement between Anguvigaq and the Quebec Government?
 - o Should similar measures be included within the management plan?
 - o Should the protection of polar bear cubs, females with cubs and bears in dens established under the 1984 regulations be maintained?
- Are there periods of the year when people should not go out looking to hunt polar bears because the meat/fur is of poor quality?
- When a quota is implemented:
 - o On what basis should it be established (for example: the number of polar bears needed by Inuit, the number of polar bears that can be hunted sustainably, harvest levels that are acceptable to the International forums, etc.)?
 - o Should it be a fixed number per community each year, or should there be some degree of flexibility built in?
 - o How often should it be re-evaluated?
- Should there be an obligation to hunt more male polar bears than females?
- Should there be any restrictions on the calibre of firearm used by polar bear hunters (this would not be applicable to bears killed in defense)?
- Should sport hunting of polar bears be allowed? Under what conditions?
- If there are to be consequences for going against the management plan who should apply them (e.g. financial penalties by government vs. traditional discipline by LNUK)

It is not the intent of the management plan working group that an answer be provided to each of these questions.

As mentioned previously, they are offered simply as a way to encourage discussion on subjects that must be addressed within the management plan.

All respondents will remain anonymous, unless they have expressly requested that their contributions be recognized in the management plan.

Questions related to Objective 2: Collect traditional and scientific knowledge of polar bears to inform management decisions:

- What are your main concerns regarding the future of polar bears?
 - o How can these concerns be addressed?
- Do polar bears appear to be healthy in your region?
- What is your view about the number of polar bears present in your region?
 - o More / less than in the past? How do you know this?
 - o Too many / not enough / numbers are ok?
- Is it acceptable to put collars on even a small number of polar bears?
 - o What are the concerns related to collaring of bears?
- How can we ensure that polar bear research is designed in collaboration with Inuit before proceeding?
 - o Who has this responsibility? (LNUK, RNUK, Landholding, NV etc.)?
- How familiar are you with research methods currently used to study polar bears? Do you support these methods? How confident are you in their results? If you are not confident, why not? What improvements can be made?
- If researchers move towards less invasive techniques, some information will be impossible for them to collect. Is it reasonable to get hunters to take certain samples from bears they kill to fill in these information gaps? What kind of samples can hunters provide?
- What is the best way to ensure that Inuit Knowledge and local observations are considered in research (during planning, field work, interpretation of results, etc.) and management?
- Are there particular aspects of hunters' knowledge that should be gathered periodically to inform management decisions?

Questions related to Objective 3: Encourage wise use and stewardship of polar bears:

- Has the relationship between Inuit and polar bears changed compared to the past?
- Is polar bear still an important factor in food security?
- Are young people hunting polar bears more/less than in the past?
 - o Are they doing it the proper way?
- Besides selling furs, are there currently other ways in which hides are used?
- Is elders' knowledge passed on to the younger generation enough? How can this knowledge transmission be improved?

Questions related to Objective 4: Establish strategies to minimize the effects of human activities on polar bears and their habitat, without compromising public safety

Industrial Activity and Tourism

- If there are industrial development (e.g. mining) projects proposed, what aspects must we pay particular attention to in order to minimize impacts on polar bears (shipping, noise, etc.)?
- Hydro-electric development has impacted polar bears in Hudson Bay, do you expect similar consequences if dams were built in other regions?
- Is shipping a concern for polar bears? Why?
- Are there any areas that are particularly important for polar bears and which should be protected?
 - o e.g. areas that are important for denning, feeding, etc.?
- If there was an interest in Nunavik to develop tourism opportunities related to polar bears:
 - o What must be done to ensure that there are no negative impacts on the bears, risks to human life and that tourism does not interfere with polar bear hunting?
 - o Are there any positive aspects related to polar bear tourism?

Pollution/Contaminants

- Are you concerned about the level of pollutions or contaminants in polar bears?
- Do you have all of the knowledge you need on the subject, as it relates to polar bear?

Parasites & Disease

- Have you noticed any changes in the health of polar bear?
 - o Have you seen more / less signs of disease in polar bear meat or organs recently?
- Is there any way for hunters to monitor the health of polar bears?

Climate Change

- Have you noticed any changes in the timing of freeze-up and ice-out or in the thickness/texture of sea ice in your region?
 - o If yes, how could this affect polar bears?
 - o If yes, could there be impacts on other species that polar bears rely on?
- Have you observed any changes in weather patterns compared to the past?
 - o If yes, what impacts could this have on polar bears, or the species they rely on?
- Has the behaviour of polar bears changed in response to climate change? What could this mean?
 - o Changes in movements or location of bears?
 - o Changes in diet?
- Should the anticipated effects of climate change on polar bears be taken in consideration when setting harvest restrictions?

Defense of Life and Property:

- Are there any issues with bears coming into communities/camps?
 - o If yes, do you think this is due to behavioral changes by bears or simply due to an increase in their number?
- Are bears more dangerous than in the past?
 - o If yes, what factors might explain this?
- Is there a need to establish deterrence programs?
 - o What kind of program/tools do you think would lead to a reduction in the number of bears killed in defence of life and/or property?
- The NILCA requires that the valuable parts of any polar bear killed in defense be forfeited to the LNUK, what should the LNUK do with them?
- Is there any need to put in place a training program, about polar bear safety, for people visiting from the South (e.g. teachers, mine workers, etc.)?

The Last Question:

- What is the most important question that we've forgotten to ask you / is there anything you would like to add???