



Jan. 31, 2018

The Honourable Dominic Leblanc  
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard  
Parliament Hill  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Leblanc:

The Canadian Arctic Resources Committee is Canada's oldest citizen's organization dedicated to environmental sustainability in Canada's Arctic. We have a long history of commenting on environmental issues and we are a vocal and committed supporter of caribou conservation for their own sake and for those who rely on them for food.

We attended, as observers, the most recent meeting of the Committee on the Status of Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in November and left the meeting very concerned over the welfare of the Dolphin and Union caribou population. After a review by the Committee of the report prepared regarding the herd, they assessed the population as endangered.

Evidence from both local Indigenous people and scientific studies suggest that the herd has undergone natural fluctuations in numbers in the past and is now at a low ebb. That being said, the population has declined severely over the last twenty years, available demographic data indicates no sign of a rapid recovery and the cumulative threats are without historical precedent.

Most of the concern about the population stems from the migratory habits of the animals. The population moves back and forth from Victoria Island to the mainland across sea ice every spring and fall. Climate change and increased shipping and associated ice breaking are causing problems for the population. The animals can have a hard time negotiating the rubble created by ice breaking. Moreover, it was suggested that without the existence of sea ice the migration of these caribou across the channel would stop and the population decline severely. They cannot swim across, and if forced to overwinter on Victoria Island, access to food would be an issue.

It is critical for these animals that shipping be controlled through their migration route. For now, this is a problem that could be dealt with almost entirely by the Canadian Coast Guard. They seem to be the only group now moving through the area and

Canadian Arctic Resources Committee  
PO Box 2822 Stn. Main, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2R2  
613.759.4284 Toll Free: 866.949.9006  
@CARCCanada carc.org

breaking up the sea ice during the winter months. If there are not too many boats, the ice can reform quite quickly.

As such, the spring isn't too big a problem. The bigger problem is the fall migration. Studies, like the one being carried out by Dr. Jackie Dawson and her colleagues at the University of Ottawa, indicate continued increases in pleasure craft and fishing vessels throughout the area during summer months. It is taking longer for the sea ice to form after periods of ever increasing boat traffic. Moreover, commercial shipping traffic will no doubt increase with the development of new harbours like the one proposed at Greys Bay.

In fact, over the past decade, the Canadian Arctic has experienced significant reductions in sea ice cover, while vessel traffic has more than doubled. Shipping in Nunavut has increased substantially in association with the exploration and extraction of natural resources, the increase in cargo trade and transport, the proliferation of the fishing and tourism industries, and the intensification of community re-supply needs.

We are aware that in 2012, the Canadian Coast Guard launched the Northern Marine Transportation Corridors Initiative to voluntarily encourage ships traveling through the Arctic to stick to a system of planned marine corridors. Moreover, we are aware that they are working with local communities to minimize negative impacts on important Inuit travel routes. While we applaud this effort, we recommend that you encourage the Canadian Coast Guard to increase this effort to also protect the migratory path of the Dolphin and Union caribou. In areas critical to endangered species we also suggest that these routes be also more than just voluntary.

Shipping through the Arctic will inevitably provide a faster and cheaper intercontinental route in an area with the promise of unexploited natural resources. Moreover, as already noted, climate change has already created longer shipping seasons and a serious increase in all vessel traffic. We therefore further recommend that you encourage Transport Canada to lead in the development of a cohesive Arctic shipping policy; a policy that balances development with environmental protection and guaranteed rights for the region's Indigenous people.

An Arctic shipping policy would not only help protect the sea ice that the Dolphin and Union caribou require for migration but address many other shipping related concerns. We refer you to a new report called "Unconstrained Foreign Direct Investment: An Emerging Challenge to Arctic Security" by CNA Analysis and Solutions that came out in November. This report outlines concerns about unrestrained investment in the Arctic.

Infrastructure in the Arctic, as it now stands, is unable to deal with the increased shipping that this investment brings with it and environmental accidents are a big concern. A clearly identified structured process and plan to address these issues is critical for the well-being of northern communities and the renewable resources that they depend on for their sustainability.

Yours sincerely,



Gary Blundell  
Program Manager

cc.

The Honourable Marc Garneau, Minister of Transportation  
Hon. Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Hon. Jim Carr, Minister of Natural Resources  
Jeffrey Hutchinson, Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard  
Ryan Barry, Executive Director, Nunavut Impact Review Board