



NIRB File No.: 22YN021
NPC File No.: 149746

May 24, 2022

Cortney Wheeler
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
501 University Crescent
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N6

Sent via email: Cortney.watt@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Re: Opportunity to address comments received regarding Fisheries and Oceans Canada's "Passive Acoustic Monitoring and UAV Assessment of the Impacts of Shipping and Development on High Arctic Beluga Whales and Narwhals" Project Proposal

Dear Cortney Wheeler:

On April 11, 2022, the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB or Board) received a referral to screen Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) "Passive Acoustic Monitoring and UAV Assessment of the Impacts of Shipping and Development on High Arctic Beluga Whales and Narwhals" project proposal from the Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC or Commission). On April 27, 2022, the NIRB circulated a public notice of the screening for this project, inviting interested parties to provide comments directly to the NIRB by May 18, 2022.

On or before May 18, 2022, the NIRB received comments from the following interested parties:

- *Government of Nunavut (GN)*
- *Crown – Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC)*
- *Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)*
- *Transport Canada (TC)*

On May 20, 2022, the NIRB received late comment submissions from the following interested parties:

- *Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA)*

All comment submissions received by the NIRB relating to this project proposal can be accessed from the NIRB's online public registry at www.nirb.ca/project/125688.

A summary of the public concerns reflected in the comment submissions relate to the following:

- Please see [Appendix A](#) for the public concerns

The NIRB would like to provide DFO with an opportunity to address the comments noted above prior to the Board rendering its determination for this screening assessment and issuing its subsequent Screening Decision Report to the responsible Minister. The NIRB respectfully requests that a response be provided directly to the NIRB by **June 7, 2022**.

If DFO determines that the time required to supply a written response is significantly greater than two (2) weeks, the Board requests written notification and an anticipated date for submission be provided as soon as possible.

Please send any forthcoming submissions directly to the NIRB at info@nirb.ca, or through the online Public Registry at www.nirb.ca.

If you have any questions or require additional clarification, please contact the undersigned directly at (867) 983-4622 or motokiak@nirb.ca.

Sincerely,



Mia Otokiak
Junior Technical Advisor
Nunavut Impact Review Board

cc: Distribution List
Richard Dwyer, Nunavut Water Board
Carson Gillis, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
Stephen Williamson-Bathory, Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Joel Fortier, Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Jared Ottenhof, Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Geoff Clark, Kitikmeot Inuit Association
Wynter Kuliktana, Kitikmeot Inuit Association
Michele LeBlanc-Harvard, Government of Nunavut – Department of Environment
Agnes Simonfalvy, Government of Nunavut – Department of Economic Development and Transportation
Mosha Cote, Nunavut Research Institute
Lisa Pirie-Dominix, Canadian Wildlife Services
Alasdair Beattie, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Hamlet of Resolute Bay
Hamlet of Pond Inlet
Hamlet of Arctic Bay
Hamlet of Kugaaruk
Hamlet of Taloyoak
Hamlet of Gjoa Haven
Resolute Bay Hunters' and Trappers Organization
Pond Inlet Hunters' and Trappers Organization
Arctic Bay Hunters' and Trappers Organization
Kugaaruk Hunters' and Trappers Organization
Taloyoak Hunters' and Trappers Organization
Gjoa Haven Hunters' and Trappers Organization

APPENDIX A



COMMENT FORM FOR NIRB SCREENINGS

The Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) has a mandate to protect the integrity of the ecosystem for the existing and future residents of Nunavut. To assess the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the project proposal, NIRB would like to hear your concerns, comments and suggestions about the following project proposal application:

Project Proposal Title:	Passive Acoustic Monitoring and UAV Assessment of the Impacts of Shipping and Development on High Arctic Beluga Whales and Narwhals		
Proponent:	Fisheries and Oceans Canada		
Location:	Qikiqtani (North Baffin) Region		
Comments Due By:	May 18, 2022	NIRB #:	22YN021

Indicate your concerns about the project proposal below:

<input type="checkbox"/> no concerns	<input type="checkbox"/> traditional uses of land
<input type="checkbox"/> water quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Inuit harvesting activities
<input type="checkbox"/> terrain	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community involvement and consultation
<input type="checkbox"/> air quality	<input type="checkbox"/> local development in the area
<input type="checkbox"/> wildlife and their habitat	<input type="checkbox"/> tourism in the area
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> marine mammals and their habitat	<input type="checkbox"/> human health issues
<input type="checkbox"/> birds and their habitat	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fish and their habitat	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> heritage resources in area	_____

Please describe the concerns indicated above:

The Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) represents and advocates for Inuit in the Qikiqtani region of Nunavut. QIA supports wildlife research projects that improve knowledge on species of socio-economic and cultural importance to Inuit. Such research should however be conducted in a manner that minimizes negative impacts on wildlife, the environment, and Inuit rights while also maximizing community involvement, training, employment, and consultation. QIA's questions and recommendations address these concerns and offer suggestions to ensure the proposed project minimizes negative impacts while maximizing benefits.

Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for this application?

The project proposes to collect biopsy (skin) samples from narwhal and beluga whales for genetic studies, and to deploy satellite tags to study movements, distribution and migratory patterns. The project proposes to satellite tag up to 10 whales, and up to 30 biopsies will be collected. Tags and biopsy darts will be remotely deployed using a crossbow or a CO2-powered rifle, with no capture and handling of animals proposed. The biopsy procedure proposed is well-established and has been used extensively in Canadian cetacean research. Most narwhal and beluga satellite-tagging in Canada to date, however, has involved the capture (using nets) and physical restraint of animals during the tagging process. Remote tagging is less invasive, and Inuit are largely supportive of attempts to reduce the invasive nature of wildlife research. Has the crossbow deployment method for satellite tagging been used on either of these species

in Canadian waters, or elsewhere? Is tag design informed by experiences with these species in Canada or elsewhere?

The proposed project will involve experienced marine mammal researchers and includes an Inuk harvester from Pangnirtung. Six people are listed on the AUP application, including one Nunavummiut researcher from Pangnirtung. There will be a total of six personnel on site (as per the NIRB application). Will Mr. Kilabuk be participating in the field work in Creswell Bay, or just in Cumberland Sound (the Animal Use Protocol (AUP) includes both study areas)? Two Resolute Bay community members are listed on the NIRB application, will both participate in the field program? Will other local Inuit be hired?

The project proposes to tag up to 10 whales in Creswell Bay, where both beluga whales and narwhals may be encountered. How will the tag distribution be prioritized by species? Will the project prioritize belugas, narwhals, or an even mix of both?

On an individual animal basis, what is the priority per animal, tagging or biopsy sampling? AUP section 23d suggests tagging will be prioritized. Will all tags be deployed before any biopsy samples are collected?

Attempts to biopsy sample or satellite tag animals will end after 20 minutes (or 10 minutes during periods of high air temperatures) if unsuccessful or if the target animal displays “active avoidance of the research vessel”. How is active avoidance defined, and how will it be monitored? QIA requests that DFO collect data and report back to NIRB and other interested parties on the time each whale is actively engaged with prior to sampling (tag or biopsy), the number of events which are ended after 20 minutes without sampling, and the number of events in which sampling attempts were discontinued due to active avoidance.

QIA supports drone-based research conducted in a manner that minimizes potential disturbance to marine mammals and Inuit harvesters. The 20 metre minimum height should be sufficient to reduce potential disturbance to narwhal and belugas, but will this be monitored and adjusted if required? Has DFO consulted with Inuit organizations (e.g., Resolute Bay HTA) on ways to conduct drone operations that do not interfere with harvesting activities?

Inuit have also expressed concerns that passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) devices could disturb marine wildlife. Has consultation on this aspect of the project been conducted?

Has the research team considered how their field project could potentially interfere with Inuit harvesting activities, and what procedures can be employed to reduce or eliminate any interference? For example, will the field team attempt to biopsy or satellite-tag whales while active harvesting is on-going, should there be such activities occurring in the area?

What measures are in place to prevent or avoid ship strikes on whales? Prop strikes may be unlikely but the proposed measures are not clear in the application.

QIA also notes and supports the relevant comments from other organizations, including Transport Canada’s statements regarding legal requirements for drone flights; CIRNAC recommendations re:



hazardous materials, maximizing Inuit benefits, and consultation; and the GN's recommendations for the protection of archaeological sites.

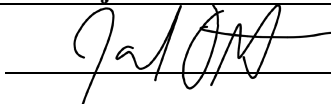
Do you support the project proposal? Yes ☒ No ☐ Any additional comments?

QIA supports the project proposal provided it is conducted in a manner that minimizes impacts to marine wildlife and Inuit land use.

Any landings on or use of Inuit Owned Lands will require the appropriate land use authorization from QIA.

Technical Comments provided by Dr. Jeff W. Higdon, and D. Bruce Stewart

Name of person commenting: Jared Ottenhof **of** Iqaluit
Position: Director, Qikiqtani **Organization:** Qikiqtani Inuit Association
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Signature:  **Date:** May 20, 2022