

**Terms of Reference  
National Peer Review Meeting (by videoconference)**

Recovery assessment under SARA for eastern arctic bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) identified as “threatened” by COSEWIC

April 7, 2006 (from 10:00 am to 4 pm – Winnipeg/Central Standard Time)

Chairperson: P. Simon

**Context**

In May 2005, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recommended that two populations of eastern Arctic bowhead whales be listed as “threatened” under *Canada’s Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The two populations were described as:

- Hudson Bay-Foxe Basin
- Davis Strait-Baffin Bay

SARA is intended to protect species at risk of extinction in Canada, and promote their recovery. SARA includes prohibitions on killing, harming, harassing, capturing, or taking individuals of species listed as threatened or endangered on schedule 1. SARA prohibits sale or trade of individuals of such species (or their parts), damage or destruction of their residences or destruction of their critical habitat.

SARA specifies that a **recovery strategy** should be prepared for species that are listed as threatened or endangered. Although a conservation strategy is in place for eastern Arctic bowheads, it requires updating to make it SARA compliant. The recovery strategy will have to address all potential sources of harm, including harvesting activities, in a way that does not jeopardize the survival and recovery of the populations concerned. Eastern Arctic bowhead whales currently support a limited subsistence harvest by Inuit. In order to address subsistence harvesting in a recovery strategy, scientific evaluation of the likelihood that recovery goals or targets will be achieved in biologically reasonable time frames should be included. The basis for the designation of recovery targets and times-to-recovery for species listed under SARA is informed by sound peer reviewed scientific advice. SARA provides for exemptions to the prohibition to harm under certain circumstances, including specific activities permitted in the recovery strategy. Therefore, it is important that, if subsistence fisheries are to continue after designation, the recovery strategy includes levels of subsistence harvest, recovery assessment, recovery rate, level of confidence, etc.

New scientific information on Eastern Arctic bowhead whales was peer reviewed by the National Marine Mammal Peer Review Committee on March 9, 2006. Conclusions from that meeting must be taken into account in the development of a Recovery Potential Assessment (RPA) for these whales. In particular, the evidence that Eastern Arctic bowheads are one population, and not the two that were described by COSEWIC, will fundamentally effect how the RPA develops. Evidence for sex or age variation in the population should also be considered.

## **Meeting Objectives - Recovery assessment for eastern arctic bowhead**

It is necessary to review information regarding population productivity and mortality sources, and possible mortality resulting from human activities. This information will be the basis for estimating the likelihood of reaching recovery goals where various activities, such as specific fisheries, are allowed. The specific objectives will be as follows:

- a) Establish the status and trajectory of the population (size, distribution, recent growth rate, etc.).
- b) Determine whether or not recovery is feasible and, if so, what would be realistic recovery target and timeframes. Participants will discuss biological criteria/properties that would describe the state of a recovered bowhead population under SARA requirements. This discussion should permit the development of interim descriptions of the biological properties of suitable recovery targets and recovery times that could be applied to the bowhead population. Minimum recovery targets can be identified on strictly biological and ecological grounds, however, the Bowhead Recovery Team may set recovery targets at higher levels for social, cultural, or economic reasons.
- c) Identify and quantify, to the extent possible, all potential sources of threat (human-induced mortality and other sources of mortality), including what we know of the likelihood of change in the level of mortality for each identified source.
- d) Conduct a risk analysis that the population would fail to recover according to the pre-established recovery target and timeframe, for various allowable harm levels.
- e) How much scope exists for changing human activities and how will this change the risk that the population would fail to recover.

## **Output of the meeting**

The output of the meeting will be a proceedings document and a Recovery Potential Allowable Harm Assessment for eastern Arctic bowheads. Information from the meeting will be used in a Regional Science Advisory Meeting to be held in Iqaluit April 25-26, 2006 for the development of a Science Advisory Report on Eastern Arctic bowheads. It will also be used by the Recovery Team to update the Bowhead Conservation Strategy so it is SARA compliant. The initial workshop to develop the recovery strategy is being held in Iqaluit April 26-27, 2006.

A summary of the scientific information/advice issued from this meeting should be made available by mid-April for use at the Science Advisory meeting. Final proceedings and the reports will be available by May 30, 2006.

## **Participation**

The participants invited to this meeting include DFO Science, DFO Fisheries and Aquaculture Management, Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) and U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).