

BELUGA BULLETIN

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photo: Danny Swainson

Overview

*Lisa Loseto & Sonja Ostertag,
 Fisheries and Oceans Canada*

BELUGA SUMMIT
 QILALUGATIKUN 2016 KATIHANIAQTUT



Government, academic and non-academic researchers, representation from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, local Inuvialuit and representatives from Inuvialuit and Alaskan co-management boards and committees participated in the *Beluga Summit*.

THE BELUGA SUMMIT HELD IN INUVIK, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, FEBRUARY 22-25 2016 WAS A SUCCESS! Organized jointly by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the Fisheries Joint Management Committee (FJMC) and the Inuvialuit Game Council (IGC), this event reflected the success of cooperative management of beluga whales in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

This event provided the opportunity for the scientific knowledge generated through over 30 years of to be presented alongside Traditional Ecological Knowledge, by researchers, local Inuvialuit and representatives from Inuvialuit and Alaskan co-management Boards. More than 80 participants shared their knowledge on beluga whales from all perspectives and discussed the future of beluga research and management.

Topics ranged from beluga health and migration to a review of the Husky Lakes Entrapment Plan. The Beluga Summit succeeded in bringing together community members, researchers and co-management representatives to discuss the state of knowledge of beluga whales and guide future research and monitoring in the region. A summary of the topics covered by community delegates, researchers and co-management representatives is provided inside this Bulletin.

Community Day

Patrick Gruben, Inuvialuit Game Council

The day began with welcoming opening words by Duane Smith (Chair IRC), Patrick Gruben (Chair IGC), Vic Gillman (Chair FJMC) and Michelle Wheatley (Dir.Science DFO).

All communities were represented by a Youth, Harvester and Elder chosen by the local Hunters and Trappers Committee, and each provided a presentation on belugas reflecting their community's

perspective, knowledge and concerns. Each of the six communities presented knowledge and perspectives on beluga whales. Communities had a lot to learn from one another and had a lot to share with the scientists. It was great to see how different hunting and food preparation methods were across communities and how much knowledge sharing continued throughout the meeting.



photo: Michael Niziol

Our cousins in Alaska are facing similar challenges with pressures of climate change and are interested in increasing partnerships across the border.



photo: Sonja Ostertag

While it was good to see youth involvement it was recognized that we need to include many more to ensure the knowledge is passed on to the younger generations.



photo: Sonja Ostertag

There continues to be an interest in continued knowledge sharing both across communities and with scientists. It was proposed that future meetings could take place at whaling camps to better share knowledge and information about beluga whales.

Research Day

Lisa Loseto, Fisheries and Oceans Canada



photos: Michael Niziol



Key outcomes from the day included

- » Continue eating country food and beluga, it is good for you and is an important source of nutrients such as Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids, protein and vitamins such as selenium
- » Toxoplasma (cat parasite) is not new in the Arctic and is present in most raw foods (wildlife and store bought); therefore, pregnant women or people with compromised immune systems are advised against eating raw wildlife foods.
- » Inuvialuit have very low mercury exposure and low toxoplasma exposure (8% of people) when compared to other Arctic regions, based on the findings from the 2008 Inuit Health Survey.
- » Researchers and Boards that study wildlife and human health need to work as a team because human health and beluga health are connected.

Future research needs that were highlighted included

- » Studying climate change impacts to belugas, their habitat, their food and their condition
- » Using new technologies alongside TEK should be explored to gain better understandings of changes and impacts to belugas
- » Training beluga monitors to be resources for their communities regarding beluga health and research in the ISR
- » Continued ecosystem research paired with beluga and human activity impacts research to build our understanding of cumulative impacts

Co-management Day

Vic Gillman, Fisheries Joint Management Committee

The Beluga Summit highlighted the strength in the co-management framework and Inuvialuit Final Agreement. We look forward to the next Beluga Summit and support its continuation on a regular basis for future years.

Lois Harwood highlighted the strength of knowledge and research in the region and how it has pushed us forward with sound decision making. Danny Swainson demonstrated how well the FJMC, DFO scientists and the communities have worked together as a team to develop the world's longest beluga monitoring program. Connie Blakeston reminded us that all partners are considered in planning for the Beaufort Sea and Beluga whales through the Integrated Ocean's Management Program.

A Husky Lakes Entrapment Session was held for community delegates and Boards to review the action plan for beluga entrapments in the Husky Lakes. Outcomes and recommendations from the Beluga Summit will be included the FJMC Beluga Management Plan.



photo: Danny Swainson

Youth Perspective

Kathleen Snow, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Youth delegates from the six communities in the ISR shared their knowledge and perspectives to Summit participants through various approaches.

It is important to discuss the current state of scientific and traditional knowledge of beluga, encourage proper hunting practices and learn from each other in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, which is why it is imperative that the younger generation take part in the conversation now.

photos: Sonja Ostertag, except bottom right by Devin Waugh



C.J. Haogak from Sachs Harbour, who has been a beluga monitor for a few years, gave an informative snapshot of what is happening with beluga and harvesting in his region.



Melanie Wolki from Paulatuk spoke about the time that she has spent at Tippi to collect samples and learn about the preparation of beluga.



Kelly Nigiyok jumped with both feet into the world of beluga monitoring in Ulukhaktok and is keen to continue doing so.



Deon Arey of Aklavik spoke proudly on behalf of his Daduk, "Ugyiak" Joe Arey Sr. and his community of Aklavik about changes he and his community have been observing in beluga presence and harvesting.



Jocelyn Noksana from Tuktoyaktuk has been engaged in the Hendrickson Island monitoring program for many years and gave an overview about how her community is involved in the Hendrickson Island beluga monitoring program.



Kyle Conley from Inuvik is an avid outdoorsman who brought some of that to the Summit by creating an informative presentation about his time as a whale monitor and growing up on the land.

