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# News Release

For Immediate Release

## Minister initiates interim moratorium on Baffin Island caribou harvest

**IQALUIT, Nunavut (December 19, 2014)** - The Government of Nunavut (GN) today announced an interim moratorium on the harvest of caribou on Baffin Island effective January 1, 2015. In 2014, the Department of Environment conducted an aerial survey of the entire Baffin Island caribou range. After extensive analysis, the results of the survey show there are approximately 5,000 caribou on Baffin Island. This is a 90-95 per cent decrease from a 1990s population estimate.

"These extremely low numbers are consistent with what Baffin Island hunters have been telling us," said Johnny Mike, Minister of Environment. "This is an urgent situation, and the GN is taking immediate measures to protect the sustainability of Baffin Island caribou. This is a shared responsibility, and we are working with our co-management partners, hunters and communities to complete a plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Baffin caribou for our future generations."

The interim moratorium is in place until further notice. Long-term conservation measures are being developed in accordance with the wildlife co-management system outlined in the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA)*.

"*Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq*, respect and care for the land, animals and the environment, is paramount to our traditional values and knowledge. Inuit have always respected the natural cycle of caribou, and we now face additional pressures with the use of modern equipment on the land," said Minister Mike. "Respecting this interim moratorium is necessary so that Baffin Island caribou can repopulate."

Pursuant to Section 5.3.24 of the NLCA, in "urgent and unusual circumstances" the Minister of the Environment has the option of making an interim decision to modify harvesting activities, which is consistent with the resolution made by the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) following their December 2014 meeting.

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## Backgrounder

The April 2014 aerial survey of the entire Baffin Island caribou population estimates that there is currently a total of between 3,462 and 6,250 caribou on Baffin Island, down 90-95 per cent since the 1990s estimate of approximately 120,000 – 330,000.

While barrenground caribou, like those found on Baffin Island, experience natural population fluctuations over a 50-90 year cycle, these numbers are extremely low. This means Baffin Island caribou are at a high risk of being wiped out, particularly in North Baffin where there are somewhere between 159-622 caribou in total.

Possible factors for this decline include:

- Overgrazing, which is the primary natural cause of population decline. This is when caribou numbers are high and increasing, and they eat the vegetation faster than it can re-grow. Eventually the number of caribou is more than the vegetation can support, and the population crashes.
- Increased human population leads to an increased demand for caribou.
- More sophisticated hunting techniques and equipment.
- Hunters are travelling farther to reach caribou.
- Potential impact due to industrial activity.

Over the last 18 months, the GN has been working with our co-management partners, as well as communities, Baffin Hunter and Trappers Organizations, elders and scientists, to explore management options. Based on those discussions, with consideration of these factors now and in the future, the Department of Environment has begun drafting a comprehensive management plan.

The new population estimates warrant immediate management actions to reduce the risk of destroying some or all of the Baffin Island caribou population. If unrestricted harvesting continues on this very small, fragile population while the management plan is being developed, it may result in the loss of all caribou on Baffin Island.

The purpose of the interim moratorium is to protect the existing herd and enable them to repopulate over time. There is no immediate solution to this situation. It is unknown how long it will take to reach a sustainable Baffin Island caribou population. The next step is for the NWMB to have a public hearing in March or April of 2015 to review management options for Baffin Island caribou, and consider what management actions to take.

Conservation officers in Nunavut will be working closely with community HTOs to monitor the situation. As of January 1, 2015, hunting caribou on Baffin Island may result in an investigation that could lead to fines and/or charges.