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NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 12  
(Second Session, 1966)

SPORT HUNTING OF MUSKOXEN

DISPOSITION

Tabled	To Committee	Accepted as Read	Accepted as Amended	Deferred (to Session)	Rejected	Noted not Considered
31/8/66	5-XI-66	5-XI-66				

## SPORT HUNTING OF MUSKOXEN

At the Thirty-second session of Council, January 24-February 1, 1966, Council asked to be provided with a paper outlining the arguments, for and against the Eskimos having a direct stake in big game hunting of muskoxen and the difficulties involved. (Reference page 444 of Volume 1 of the Debates).

Because of indiscriminate killings of muskoxen by whites and Eskimos at the turn of the century, the numbers of this species had decreased to alarmingly low levels. In order to avoid their complete extinction, muskoxen were declared as "a species in danger of extinction" and in 1917 the take was strictly prohibited. This prohibition, carefully observed by the residents of the North, but also strictly enforced by Government Agencies, resulted in substantial population increase over the past several decades.

A game survey conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1961 revealed that there were approximately 7,500 muskoxen on the Queen Elizabeth Islands, with the main concentration on Ellesmere, Melville, Bathurst and Axel Heiberg Islands. The survey concluded that the muskox population had reached a level of abundance to permit a small annual kill. Based on these survey results, a submission to Council was made during the June, 1965 Session to permit the holder of a General Hunting Licence to hunt male muskoxen on Axel Heiberg, Bathurst, Ellesmere and Melville Islands.

However, the complexities and possible detrimental consequences resulting from the proposed relaxation of muskox protection were pointed out, and an attempt was made to demonstrate that even adherence to a quota was not adequate for a rational utilization program. It is imperative that the take of correct animals, in this particular case the lone non-herd bulls within the limits of the quota, be assured. Concern was voiced whether this could be accomplished by the Eskimo. Muskoxen are scattered all over the islands and the take of non-herd bulls might require a hunter to travel distances in excess of several hundred miles. Furthermore, the enforcement of a regulated kill is not possible under the present circumstances. Realizing that a restricted take of muskoxen by sport hunters would substantially improve the depressed economic situation of local Eskimos, it was suggested that sport hunting of muskoxen be permitted in the Queen Elizabeth Islands.

This recommendation was not based on purely financial consideration alone but primarily on the principles of game management. By sport hunting, it would be assured that only old bulls who had outlived their purpose would be taken. This could be accomplished without specific problems pertaining to enforcement or otherwise, since sport hunters are only interested in big trophies. Due to the fact that old bulls expelled from the herds would die within a few years because of their life expectancy or increased vulnerability to predation, no actual reduction of annual herd increments would be affected. It would be strictly a harvest of the surplus animals which otherwise would be lost without any benefit to the Eskimo or to the herd itself. Accordingly Council requested that the Administration be asked to prepare a paper outlining a plan whereby the Eskimo of the Arctic Islands would be given a stake in the muskox herds, and would have control over access to the muskox by sport hunters.

In compliance with this request, the Superintendent of Game spend approximately four weeks of August, 1965, in the Queen Elizabeth Islands to discuss the muskox situation and the possibility of a sport hunting program, including the implications, responsibilities and requirements involved, as well as the advantages to the local Eskimos.

A special effort was made to avoid the forcing of an immediate decision on the Eskimo. After a meeting at Resolute Bay, those who attended were encouraged to discuss the subject matter between themselves and to make their recommendations when the Superintendent would return after approximately 10 days. As such an opportunity would not present itself for the discussion at Grise Fiord, the R.C.M. Police Constable at that location was contacted by radio. The advantages of sport hunting were outlined and he was asked to discuss the plan with the Eskimos prior to the arrival of the Superintendent so that the Eskimos

did have an opportunity of becoming familiar with the proposal and giving it their consideration. The meeting at Grise Fiord was held eight days after the radio contact.

All Eskimos of both settlements accepted the plan enthusiastically. On his visit to the Queen Elizabeth Islands, the Superintendent explained the many ramifications of the plan, provided prospective guides with a basic introduction to guiding requirements, and obtained the fundamental data needed for initiating and conducting a sport hunting program.

The Superintendent's report included a proposal to permit sport hunting according to a plan whereby the Eskimo would profit exclusively and the muskox populations would be safeguarded. Assistance, guidance and supervision, were to be provided by the Department until the Eskimos become ready to take over completely.

This proposal was based on a general assessment of the situation, fully realizing that more concrete facts are required for a rational sport hunting program. A concerted effort was to be made to obtain the necessary biological data from the results of the proposed sport hunting program.

The complexity of the sport hunting for muskoxen problem and the drastic change from the traditional concepts of game management in the Northwest Territories, necessitated seeking the advice and opinions of other persons and/or Branches, knowledgeable in the field, so as to arrive at a definite objective conclusion.

Advice and opinions differed greatly. Although there was general agreement on the fundamental principles involved, certain reservations and conflicts require further discussions and negotiations before they can be resolved.

The main differences were as follows:

#### Inadequate Consultation With Eskimos

As it has been pointed out, only Eskimos at Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord have been consulted. There exists a strong argument that there is no need to consult Eskimos in other areas because the Administration does not contemplate sport hunting in zones other than on the Queen Elizabeth Islands. It should be borne in mind, however, that Eskimos unaware of the specific arrangements made for the Queen Elizabeth Islands could conceive that the restrictions on muskoxen have been abolished and they too would commence hunting this species. Consequently, it is essential that all Eskimos be at least informed.

#### Inadequate Game Management Staff

Concern has been expressed that there is not sufficient Game Management staff to supervise the proposed operation, to collect biological data and to recommend adequate quotas for assuring a rational, continuing sport hunting program. In contrast the opinion has been voiced that it would be sufficient to station a few Game Officers at Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord, approximately two weeks prior to the season for conducting guide training courses and for arranging the final details of the hunt. Game Officers would accompany hunters and guides in the field, and gather information for recommending future quotas.

The second opinion, based on economics and full utilization of manpower, appears to be a strong argument. However, there must be the fullest assurance that the objectives of the project are not jeopardized.

#### Insufficient Research Data Available

Authentic facts and figures are the prerequisite of any meaningful management program. Despite the fact that the Canadian Wildlife Service has carefully studied the biology of the muskoxen on the Queen Elizabeth Islands, and that knowledge pertaining to numbers, age and sex composition of the herds has been accumulated, it is

felt that more research is necessary before permitting sport hunting. The conflicting opinions as to whether to go ahead only after adequate research or to go ahead on a plan designed to collect the necessary data through sport hunting, are not easily reconciled.

#### Eskimos Are Not Yet Ready to Look After Prospective Big-Game Hunters Properly

This is true and presents an involved problem. A certain alertness and mental attitude are required to successfully arrange hunts, charter air craft and properly cater to and guide hunters. The Department will have to provide assistance, training and supervision. It is felt that a careful assessment of the many intrinsic factors should be made before a decision can be considered.

#### Only Eskimos Should Be Allowed To Kill Muskoxen

As only Eskimos have lived and hunted in the Canadian North during the past centuries, and as their observance of the prohibition to kill muskoxen has saved this species from extinction, a strong plea is made to reserve the privilege of shooting muskoxen exclusively for Eskimos. On the other hand, it is argued that this would mean building in special rights for Eskimos which would be contrary to the efforts towards integration presently being put forward. Furthermore, depending on surplus populations, a very restricted take of muskoxen could be annually permitted. Consequently, few individuals would benefit.

By sport hunting, on the otherhand, most of the Eskimos in the settlement would share in the cash benefits as well as in the meat.

#### Co-ops Are Not Representing the Community As A Whole

It has been proposed that Eskimo Co-operatives would be the logical agencies to accept the responsibility for the sport hunting program. The conflicting argument is that the Co-operatives are not representing the entire community. As it is the desire of Council that the maximum benefit for the greatest number of Eskimos be attained, this argument must be objectively evaluated before reaching a decision.

#### Other Conflicting Opinions

There are naturally other conflicting opinions such as: open season, adequacy of hunters' accommodation, licence and trophy fees, etc. These conflicts, although aggravating the entire problem, are of minor significance and can be resolved by consultation. Resolving conflicting opinions, which in part may be based on emotions or on purely financial consideration, is a difficult task because the objectivity has become biased and/or distorted. Furthermore, the proposed program must be compatible as far as is possible with traditional and economic needs of the Eskimo people as well as with principles of game management and conservation.

#### Conclusion

Because it is essential that the people understand the meaning and purpose of any program, there exists the general consensus that the residents of the entire muskox range should be consulted and informed before instituting a sport hunting program for muskox. Consultation with Eskimos will always be difficult because of the many far-scattered settlements.

As a first step in this respect, a paper concerning the abolition of the Arctic Islands Preserve has been distributed to the greatest possible number of persons throughout the Territories. The main effects resulting from the abolition were outlined, and on an accompanying letter, it was requested

to give this paper widest publicity.

As a follow-up, a paper specifically dealing with muskox situation was translated into the Eskimo language and distributed to all Eskimo Settlements. It is anticipated that this paper explaining in detail the history, recovery, present status and economic significance of muskoxen for certain areas under specific conditions and outlining the difficulties of management, benefits derived from Sport hunting, etc., will create a better understanding and will help the Administration to keep in closer contact with the people, with whose welfare they are greatly concerned.

A further report will be made to Council when sufficient information becomes available upon which recommendations for action can be based.