

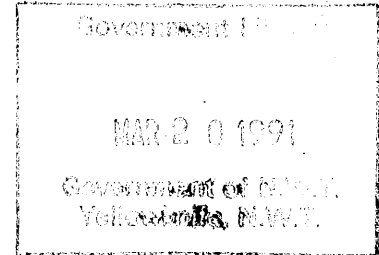


Northwest
Territories Minister of Renewable Resources



DEC 08 1990

Mr. Ludy Pudluk, M.L.A.,
(High Arctic)
General Delivery,
Resolute Bay, N.W.T.,
XOA OVO.



Dear Mr. Pudluk:

In response to your question concerning a study on mercury in whales (Question 0246-90(2) and 0277-90(2)), I would like to provide the following information. The study that was recently mentioned in the news was done by the federal government to look at pollution in beluga whales in both the Arctic and southern Canada. The Department of Renewable Resources is closely watching this and other studies that are being conducted to look at contaminants in the Arctic.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans recently completed the study on heavy metals in beluga whales in the Canadian Arctic and the St. Lawrence Estuary. Belugas were tested at several sites across the Northwest Territories, including Arviat, Grise Fiord, Pangnirtung and the Mackenzie Delta. The researchers found mercury and the heavy metal cadmium in the Northwest Territories whales. Although the levels of cadmium were high in some Arctic sites, the levels of mercury were significantly lower than the levels found in whales from the St. Lawrence group.

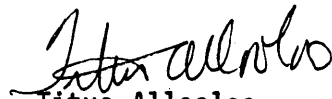
The mercury and cadmium found in the whales comes from what the belugas are eating. It is not known exactly where the heavy metals come from and how they get into the Arctic. Both cadmium and mercury are common industrial pollutants used in many parts of the world. Heavy metals such as these may be brought long distances from places outside the Northwest Territories, while some may occur naturally in the Arctic environment.

Although some contaminants are being found in marine mammals, there is no indication that northern residents need to change their diet. The benefits and nutritional value of country foods like beluga are still thought to outweigh the potential health risks. Northern residents can continue to rely on country foods in the manner they are accustomed to. There is also no indication that the heavy metals found in this study are hurting the beluga populations in the Arctic.

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I trust this information will adequately address your concerns.

Yours sincerely,


Titus Allooioo,
Minister.