

ONE QALLUNAAQ SITTING ON A DEAD BELUGA
WHALE, AN INUK ON THE LEFT, 1950s

Credit :

Père Robert Lechat o.m.i. Holdings

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**THE INFORMATION IN THIS MANUAL
REFLECTS THE ELDERS' VOICE
ON BELUGA HUNTING**



Based on group interviews held between March 8 and 15, 2006*

*AYALCO, Salomonie; Mathieu BERGERON and Marco D. MICHAUD, *Inuit Elders and their traditional Knowledge: beluga hunting and sustainable practices*, Group interviews held between March 8 and 15, 2006, Nunavik.

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Michaud, M.D.
Nunavik Inuit traditional
knowledge and beluga...
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According to the Elders of Nunavik, who met in March 2006, although Inuit now have access to electricity, grocery stores, etc., beluga harvesting is not only an important issue of their cultural identity, but also an important source of food for many.

This manual is, in part, a summary of AYALCO, BERGERON and MICHAUD (2006) that presents the point of view of the Elders of Nunavik on “beluga hunting and sustainable practices”. While collecting ITK on beluga hunting in Nunavik, many Inuit Elders pointed out the necessity to develop a “hunting manual” that would present a “summary” of what should be, in their opinion, good hunting practice.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Elders of Nunavik who generously agreed to share their knowledge on beluga hunting in March 2006.

THE SIX STEPS OF BELUGA HUNTING AS RECALLED BY THE ELDERS OF NUNAVIK

Step 1: Spot the beluga

The hunt starts with what the Elders identified as the “waiting and watching”. Settled near a place where they use to see belugas, they wait for them to come.

WAIT AND WATCH. BE PATIENT

Step 2: Direct the beluga to proper “hunt grounds”

Since the beluga tends to move away from “suspicious” noise, Inuit used to gather on the shore, throw rocks into the water to force the belugas to come closer to the shore so that the men could harpoon them. If the belugas did not come close enough to be harpooned, men got on their kayak.

IF YOU ARE NOT SURE, IF YOU HESITATE, DO NOT SHOOT

Step 3: Be careful not to lose the beluga

In the old Inuit way, hunting was done with harpoons only. It consisted in harpooning the beluga with an *anguvigaq* (toggle head harpoon) with an *avataq* attached to it. This weapon was used to slow down the beluga but moreover, to avoid losing the beluga. Even after the introduction of the rifle, this technique was still in use.

HARPOON AND APPROPRIATE RIFLE: AN EFFICIENT COMBINATION

Step 4: Kill the beluga

After the *avataq* is fixed, the beluga is harpooned with an *inuviaq* (harpoon made to kill), making sure the beluga is not suffering. As a consequence of making a beluga suffer (or wounding it), the wounded animal will alert other belugas about the danger.

SHOOT TO KILL. BE EFFICIENT

Step 5: Haul and cut up the beluga

When the beluga is dead, it is hauled on the shore and cut up. All edible parts are removed and properly taken care of.

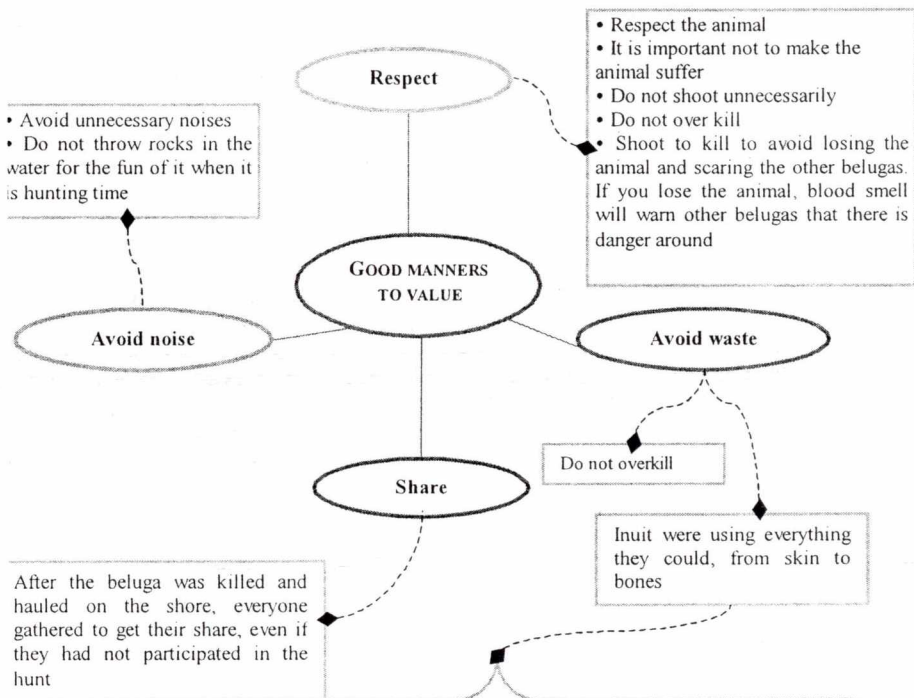
DO NOT WASTE. KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING

Step 6: Share the beluga

In the old days, even if you had not participated in the hunt, you received your share of the beluga. This practice reduced the risk of wasting meat.

LOOK AROUND, SOMEONE MAY BE IN NEED

THERE WERE NO RULES TO FOLLOW BUT GOOD MANNERS TO VALUE



Beluga oil/fat, the blubber

Used for heat and cooking

Bones

Used for tools, part of harpoon. Soft bones were

chewed (like gum)

Internal organs

Used either to feed the dogs or put aside for winter

Intestines

Made some kind of sausage by filling them with fat

Lower jaw

The lower jaw of the beluga was used to grease guns.

Meat

Pared by the women, was dried to drain the blood out for conservation

Muktuk

Delicacy for which the beluga is mainly hunted today

Sinew

Thread made from the ligaments

Skin of the whale

Used to make bags, kayaks, boots for dog (so they do not cut their paws on rocks in the spring)

Stomach

Sometimes used as an *avataq*. Sewed, it was used as a bag to store food. Used to store *muktuk*.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE MARINE MAMMAL REGULATIONS AND ELDERS' TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE ON BELUGA HUNTING

According to MMR	According to the Elders
No person shall disturb a marine mammal except when fishing for marine mammals by virtue of these Regulations	Respect the animal. Do not chase or disturb the animal. Do not scare the animal
No person shall attempt to kill a marine mammal except in a manner that is designed to kill it quickly	Shoot to kill. Avoid making the animal suffer
No person shall fish for a marine mammal without having on hand the equipment that is necessary to retrieve it (float and harpoon)	After the beluga is spotted and led to proper "hunt grounds", the hunter fixes an avataq with a toggle head harpoon (anguvigaq) to the animal
No person who kills or wounds a marine mammal shall fail to make a reasonable effort to retrieve it without delay; or abandon or discard it	Be patient, stay calm, and be careful not to lose the animal
No person who kills a cetacean or walrus shall waste any edible part of the animal	Do not waste. Use all edible parts
No person shall fish for a beluga calf, bowhead calf or narwhal calf or for an adult beluga, bowhead whale or narwhal that is accompanied by a calf.	Respect the animal. Hunting is not for pleasure but for your subsistence
No person shall fish for cetaceans with a firearm unless the person uses (a) a rifle and bullets that are not full metal-jacketed, that produce a muzzle energy of not less than 1,500 foot pounds (the most popular: 270, the 7mm magnum, the .308, the .30-06, the .300 Winchester Magnum, .303 British, etc.); or (b) a shotgun and rifled slugs that produce a muzzle energy of not less than 1,500 foot pounds (12 gauge).	Shoot to kill. Do not make the animal suffer. Use proper equipment
No person shall fish beluga after notice has been given by a fishery officer that the Total Allowable Catch has been reached.	Do not overkill. Take only what you need

WHY THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT IS REGULATING BELUGA HUNTING

Q: Why Canadian Government is regulating beluga hunting?

A: To prevent the extinction of the beluga.

Q: Why do we need to protect the beluga?

A: According to COSEWIC, in 16 years, the situation of the beluga of the Eastern Hudson Bay, went from THREATENED (in 1988) to ENDANGERED (in 2004). The situation of the beluga from the Ungava Bay is ENDANGERED since 1988.

Q: What does COSEWIC means?

A: Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

Q: What is COSEWIC?

A: COSEWIC was established in 1977 to provide Canadians with a single, scientifically sound classification of wildlife species at risk of extinction. COSEWIC began its assessments in 1978 and has met each year since then to assess species. COSEWIC uses a process based on science, Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and community knowledge, to assess the risk of extinction for species. Its process is thorough, independent and transparent. (From website: www.cosewic.gc.ca)

Q: What does THREATENED mean?

A: COSEWIC defines threatened as "species likely to become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed".

Q: What does ENDANGERED mean?

A: COSEWIC defines endangered as "species facing imminent extirpation or extinction".

Q: What is the Species at Risk Act (SARA)?

A: The Species at Risk Act (SARA) was proclaimed in June 2003, and is part of the Canadian Government's strategy for the protection of wildlife species at risk. The Act recognises that the protection of wildlife species is a joint responsibility and that all Canadians have a role to play in the protection of wildlife. It applies to all federal lands in Canada; all wildlife species listed as being at risk; and their critical habitat. (From website: www.sararegistry.gc.ca)

Q: Why did the Canadian Government get involved in the beluga protection?

A: It is the reduction of the population size of the beluga that sent an alarm message to the Government.

Q: What could happen if nothing is done?

A: If extraction of the beluga keeps up with what we have now, the Eastern Hudson Bay species could be extinct within 10 years.

Q: Why is it important to comply with Marine Mammal Regulations?

A: MMR were prepared with full consideration given to ITK values concerning beluga harvesting. Compliance to regulations makes you a participant in the overall effort to protect the beluga from extinction.

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING: WHAT ELDERS SAY ABOUT BELUGA HUNTING

Q: What to do before you leave?

A: Prepare yourself. Check your equipment, rifle, life jacket, motor, canoe, etc. Tell someone where you are going and when you are expecting to come back. Know where you are going. Know your equipment and how to use it. Make sure it works properly.

Q: What should you bring with you on board?

A: One life jacket (and wear it) for each person on board, paddles, extra gas, food, change of clothes (in a weather proof container), rope, tarp (to make a shelter, as required), first aid kit, harpoon with a float (avataq) attached to it and proper rifle (or shotgun).

Q: What rifle should you use to hunt the beluga?

A: Rifles like the 270, 7mm Magnum, 308, 30-06, 303 British, etc. Remember that it is prohibited to hunt with a 22 calibre.

Q: Where to shoot to kill the beluga?

A: With the rifle, if you have a chance for a direct shot in the forehead it is an instant kill. However, it is a difficult shot. Go for the vital area like the heart, lungs, spinal cord, etc.

Q: Why is it important not to shoot unnecessarily?

A: Belugas are sensible to sounds. Shooting for nothing could scare the belugas or you could unnecessarily wound one of them. It is a matter of safety. You could harm someone maybe even yourself.

Q: Why a designated hunter should be chosen?

A: By doing so, one person has the responsibility to shoot the beluga. This will prevent needlessly wounding the animal, scaring the beluga and will help focus everyone's attention on the same beluga. That way, there are less chances of losing the beluga.

Q: How did the rifle re-modelled beluga hunting practices?

A: The rifle proved itself to be very efficient. Belugas could be shot from further away. But its efficiency was so "great" that some aspects of the tradition were left aside. We are talking about the harpoon. Moreover, the anguvigaq is also (sometimes) left aside. But the Elders' experience shows that the combination of both traditions (Rifle and anguvigaq) proves to be an efficient way of harvesting beluga.

Q: Why is the harpoon so important, even today?

A: When shooting the beluga, there are chances that it will die and stay under the surface. If an avataq is attached to the beluga, the avataq will bring it back up to the surface.

Q: Why is it important to be careful not to harm the beluga or make it suffer?

A: Respecting the beluga is very important. The blood that will leak from the wound will produce a smell in the water and warn the other belugas that there is danger in the area.

Q: Why is it important to stay calm?

A: Staying calm will:

- i) Prevent needless shooting*
 - ii) Prevent scaring the animal*
 - iii) You will be more efficient when shooting*
 - iv) You will be more alert to what's going on around you*
 - v) You will have less chance of wounding a beluga and/or someone else (if not you).*
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Q: Why is it preferable not to chase the beluga?

A: It is, first of all, a question of safety and respect for the animal. It will also scare the beluga, not to mention that you could wound a beluga, someone else or even yourself.

Q: What is “a safe hunting practice”?

- A:*
- Use proper equipment and know your equipment before you leave.*
 - Have a GPS with you and know how to use it. Bring extra batteries.*
 - Carry change of clothes, a blanket and matches in a weather proof container.*
 - Have a tarp in case you have to build a shelter.*
 - Notify someone that you are leaving, where you are going and when you expect to be back.*
 - Make sure you have enough gas. Bring extra just in case.*
 - Before shooting, make sure you have a clean shot, without “obstacle”.*
 - Do not stand in the canoe to shoot.*
 - Do not overload your boat.*
 - Wear an appropriate size life jacket for your protection.*
 - Do not rush. Do not panic.*
 - Avoid unnecessary shooting.*
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Q: How did the motor boat re-modelled beluga hunting practices?

A: The motor boat is efficient because of its speed. Quicker to go, hunters are more efficient. But again, its efficiency is so “great” that people abandoned some of their traditions, “rules” and “values”. Hunters have the “means” of chasing the beluga rather than simply waiting for them to come. But the most negative aspect of motor boats is noise pollution.

Q: Why do you need to hunt with the current?

A: Belugas are very sensitive to sounds. If the current is from east to west, you have to travel west to east when approaching the beluga. Because if you move the same way the current does, the beluga will hear you almost immediately, even from a distance.

Q: Why is it important to share?

A: There are two reasons why sharing is important. First, some Elders cannot go out to harvest by and for themselves. Second, some people are in needs and would benefit from receiving some meat.
