

Greenland Must End Narwhal Hunt to Save Populations from Imminent Extinction

30+ Conservation Organizations Urge Greenland to Cancel Narwhal Hunting Quotas

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, January 28, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Naalakkersuisut (Greenland's government) must immediately cancel narwhal hunting quotas for Southeast Greenland or risk losing three populations of these whales forever, according to a [letter](#) delivered yesterday to Prime Minister Múte Bourup Egede on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) and more than 30 other animal protection and conservation organizations representing tens of millions of citizens around the globe.

Despite the recent adoption by Naalakkersuisut of meaningful conservation measures to help preserve the fragile Arctic environment, such as banning uranium mining and suspending oil exploration, it disregarded the advice of scientific experts, including its own advisors, when it issued a hunting quota for 50 narwhals in the region in 2022, the letter stated.

"In contrast to these positive steps, we are deeply concerned that Naalakkersuisut recently issued hunting quotas for 50 narwhals from three populations in Southeast Greenland that are facing imminent extinction due to hunting pressure," wrote Susan Millward, AWI's acting executive director.

Millward further noted that the government's decision contradicts the recent advice of both Pinngortitaleriffik (the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources) and the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO — a regional intergovernmental organization for the management of marine mammals in the North Atlantic) to immediately reduce the quotas to zero.

In October, a NAMMCO working group stated unequivocally that the quota should be reduced "to avoid the extinction of these stocks in the near future." It was the first time that a NAMMCO working group determined that a marine mammal population would be [eradicated](#) if catches continue, according to Fernando Ugarte, head of the Department of Birds and Mammals at Pinngortitaleriffik.

Narwhals, known as the unicorns of the sea, are medium-sized Arctic whales with a spiraled ivory tusk that can measure up to two meters long. They are hunted by indigenous communities in Greenland and Canada for local consumption and to sustain a lucrative international market for

their unique tusks.

Narwhal skin (mattak) has recently become the most valuable hunting product in Greenland, soaring in value by 898 percent since 1982. High prices paid for mattak in larger Southwest Greenland communities create a strong incentive to continue targeting the imperiled Southeast Greenland populations of narwhals. Despite the threat that these populations will be eradicated if hunting is not halted, Greenland's government has resisted efforts to protect the whales, [claiming](#) that a zero hunting quota would threaten food supply and cultural continuity for the communities in East Greenland.

Along with hunting, narwhals are threatened by climate change and disturbances from the growth in shipping, commercial fisheries, industrial development (e.g., oil and gas exploration), and Arctic tourism. In addition to urging an immediate end to hunting, the NAMMCO working group recommended that Naalakkersuisut regulate shipping activities from large vessels, including cruise ships, along the East Greenland coastline, and reduce the effects of climate change to prevent habitat fragmentation and range reduction.

"The threat to Southeast Greenland narwhals could not be more obvious or more urgent," Millward said. "The writing is on the wall; if the hunts do not stop immediately, three populations of these incredible animals will be lost forever."

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The Animal Welfare Institute (www.awionline.org) is a nonprofit charitable organization founded in 1951 and dedicated to reducing animal suffering caused by people. AWI engages policymakers, scientists, industry, and the public to achieve better treatment of animals everywhere – in the laboratory, on the farm, in commerce, at home, and in the wild. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for updates and other important animal protection news.

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