



Tłı̨chǫ Government

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Government of  
Northwest Territories  
Gouvernement des  
Territoires du Nord-Ouest

Mr. Grant Pryznyk, Chair  
Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board  
4504 49<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE  
YELLOWKNIFE NT X1A 1A7

OCT 20 2016

Dear Mr. Pryznyk:

**Clarifications on Response to Reasons for Decision Related to Joint Proposal for the Management of the Bathurst ʔekwǫ (Barren-ground Caribou) Herd**

The Tłı̨chǫ Government (TG) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) have received the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board's (WRRB) letter of August 26, 2016. This letter requested clarification on TG and ENR's response of July 15, 2016 to the WRRB report entitled "*Report on a Public Hearing Held by the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board 23-24 February 2016, Yellowknife, NT & Reasons for Decisions Related to a Joint Proposal for the Management of the Bathurst ʔekwǫ (Barren-ground Caribou) Herd, Part A*". TG and ENR would like to provide the following responses.

1. As per Recommendation #1-2016, the WRRB understands that the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone (MCBCMZ) is the preferred approach for the 2016/17 harvest season as it is challenging to create and implement a system of fixed subzones on a short-term time frame. TG and ENR have noted that, in order to implement a system of subzones, a consensus on the appropriate features on the natural landscape area to allow smaller zones to be properly mapped and incorporated into legal descriptions is necessary. As such, the Board requests the following clarifications:
  - a. Is the subzone approach the most effective way to manage the caribou harvest? If yes, what progress has been made to date in developing the subzone approach? What is the timeline for implementation?
  - b. If the subzone approach is not the most effective way to manage the caribou harvest, will TG and ENR continue to use the MCBCMZ approach indefinitely?

**TG & ENR Response:** Based on the discussions between TG and ENR, the subzone approach is not being pursued further at this time. TG and ENR will instead focus on refining the Bathurst mobile zone. One of the main reasons that a subzone approach was considered an attractive option was that the boundaries, once established, would not change and the boundaries could follow natural features like rivers. Such boundaries would be relatively easy for hunters, officers and others on the land to identify. If the collared caribou moved little, then the Bathurst no-harvest zone would be made up of a number of subzones that were well-defined and changed rarely. However, a subzone approach would also present some challenges in implementation.

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To keep the no-harvest area relatively small, subzones would have to be small and there would need to be many. Creating a large number of subzones and defining them all legally would be a large task.

To be effective across the entire possible spring, fall and winter range of the Bathurst herd, sub-zones would have to be created in not only R/BC/01, R/BC/02 and R/BC/03, but also outside Wek'èezhì to the east and west. That would require consultation and discussion in the Sahtú and Tł̨chq̨ land claim areas and further east where there are unsettled land claims.

On balance, TG and ENR believe that a mobile Bathurst zone with the modifications proposed is the best option at this time, and the intent is to use the MCBCMZ for the foreseeable future.

The same basic purpose of a well-defined no-harvest zone that changes rarely can be accomplished by modifying the mobile zone as TG and ENR have proposed. The buffer on the collar locations has been increased from 30-40 km to 60 km and the boundaries will not change unless collared caribou move out of the zone. TG and ENR have also suggested that the boundaries of the MCBCMZ could be amended to follow natural features like rivers or lake edges, provided this does not affect conservation of the herd, again to make the zone easier for hunters and others to identify.

TG and ENR will evaluate the mobile zone approach on an ongoing basis over the winter, and assess the need to adjust or refine operational implementation of the zone on an ongoing basis. Through the Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group, TG and ENR will engage and regularly update WRRB staff winter on an assessment of the mobile zone approach.

2. As per Recommendation #2-2016, the WRRB recognizes that ENR is currently in a period of fiscal and budgetary restraints. While ENR is unable to commit to weekly aerial monitoring of the MCBCMZ, regular monitoring by air and by ground patrols will occur, as done in winters 2014/15 and 2015/16. As such, the Board requests the following clarifications:

- a. What aerial and ground-based monitoring was conducted in 2014/15 and 2015/16?
- b. When were the aerial and ground-based patrols done, i.e. how is 'regular' defined?

The WRRB appreciates TG and ENR agreeing to provide weekly updates to the Board with any new monitoring information. However, the Board requests that weekly updates should be given even if no patrols are conducted, i.e. the update would indicate that no new monitoring information is available as no patrols were conducted.

**ENR Response:** A summary on aerial and ground-based patrols in the last two winters is provided below. ENR can provide weekly updates on new information to the WRRB. However, given that there will likely be many weeks in which no additional information is available, routine updates will in most cases be short and email should be sufficient. More substantive information will be provided as it is available, and it may be useful to use periodic meetings of the Barren Ground Caribou Technical Working Group as a forum for updating and discussion by TG, ENR and WRRB. ENR also notes that there may be occasions when investigations into such activities as (possible) illegal harvesting are underway and there are confidentiality requirements associated with investigations that do not allow immediate reporting.

### **Aerial and Ground-Based patrols in 2014/15 and 2015/16**

#### **Aerial Patrols:**

- Bathurst caribou have usually settled into their winter staging area by mid - to late December, and their movement and distribution are limited and predictable until late April at the outset of spring migration. This is confirmed by monitoring the movement and location of Bathurst collared animals.
- This is also the time period when the MCBCMZ is implemented and when no caribou harvest is allowed.
- In order to ensure and confirm that caribou are within the MCBCMZ early in the winter, aerial reconnaissance flights are conducted around the perimeter of the MCBCMZ to assess the number of caribou located immediately on the outside (if any) of the mobile zone. This information is used to evaluate the proper size of the buffer area needed to create the MCBCMZ and verify if any hunting is taking place. It usually requires one or two aerial flights the first month after caribou have moved into their winter staging area to address this objective.
- Information recorded during these flights includes: 1) number and location of caribou, 2) presence of snow machine trails coming in or out of the MCBCMZ, and 3) presence of hunter kill sites.
- For the remainder of the winter, the MCBCMZ is usually flown once per month for enforcement purposes with emphasis on areas where potential hunting might occur based on the winter distribution of Bathurst caribou and accessibility. These areas have been 1) between Wekweètì and Lower Carp Lake on the Yellowknife River, 2) a corridor between Gordon - Brown - Snap Lakes via the Tibbitt-Contwoy to winter road, and 3) between the southeast edge of the MCBCMZ and the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.
- In addition, further assessment of hunting activity is undertaken for both the Bluenose-East and Bathurst herds during: 1) the pre-collaring reconnaissance fixed wing survey normally conducted in late February early March, 2) a rotary-wing based caribou classification survey done in March, and 3) rotary-wing based collaring efforts done in March and sometime early April for those two herds as well as for the Beverly herd.

### Ground-based Patrols

- Community-based caribou monitors (4-6 monitors) are hired from late December until April each winter for each of the Tłı̨ch̨ communities.
- Caribou monitors are also hired between December and April from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) communities (4 monitors) to work with ENR wildlife officers to conduct road and snow machine patrols along the Contwoyto winter road.
- In addition, 4-6 monitors are hired from the Łutselk'e Dene First Nation, with monitoring done mostly to the east of Łutselk'e.
- In addition, check stations are operational for the same period of time on both North Slave Region winter roads with additional harvest monitoring in place.
- Community, winter roads and check station monitors keep track of movement and activities of hunters. When evidence of potential illegal harvest is detected (kill sites, snow machine trails, no authorization cards, etc), the incident is reported to ENR enforcement officers and further investigation is initiated.
- All non-commercial vehicles are asked to check into the monitoring stations. Hunters are asked to report any wildlife sightings, wildlife harvesting and other general vehicle information such as vehicle description, and license plate information. Hunters are also asked to provide any hunting license and tag information.
- When the winter road is open, ENR wildlife officers are stationed at the monitoring station for one week periods, with new officers rotated through weekly. Generally, wildlife officer presence at these check stations begins when winter the road opens in January, and the station remains operational until the road closes in early April. Monitoring is done jointly with the YKDFN and Tłı̨ch̨ monitors. When there are reports of caribou near the edge of the MCBCMZ, officers on snowmachines will patrol the area to ensure there is no hunting activity within that area.
- In addition, signage is posted to indicate the location of the MCBCMZ to allow hunters to know that they are not allowed to hunt within the specified area.

ENR is prepared to update the WRRB weekly on any monitoring activities that occur. ENR is also prepared to meet regularly with WRRB and TG staff to discuss aerial and ground patrol activities in further detail, as well as any opportunities for improvements to future patrols and monitoring.

3. As per Recommendation #4-2016, the WRRB understands that the Community-based Diga (Wolf) Harvesting Project will be implemented in the winter of 2016/17. TG and ENR have agreed to establish criteria to evaluate the success of the Pilot Project. As such, the Board request the following clarification:

a. What is the status of development of the criteria to evaluate success of the Pilot Project?

The WRRB is aware that TG and ENR have identified that regular communications about the Pilot Project will be conducted through the Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group. However, in addition, the Board would like an in-person update during its regularly scheduled meetings in November, 2016 and May, 2017 to discuss the start-up and follow-up of the Pilot Project, respectively.

**TG Response:** Tłıchq want to be active participants in wildlife and predator management on their lands. This was reinforced during the recent WRRB public hearings on Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds in spring 2016, when Tłıchq community members stated that they do not want to simply sit at home anymore; they want to be involved in caribou and wildlife management. With respect to wolves, Tłıchq have recommended that caribou predation be dealt with in a traditionally acceptable manner. In Tłıchq communities there are many cultural and social considerations and taboos associated with respectful hunting of wolves. Consequently, the main focus of the community-based Wolf Harvesting Pilot Project is to share Tłıchq knowledge as well as supporting and building expertise among those Tłıchq hunters who wish to harvest wolves. Therefore a key objective of the Pilot Project is to encourage and support Tłıchq hunters to increase their harvest of wolves during the winter.

Through the Pilot Project, the Tłıchq Government will identify Tłıchq hunters and convene a training workshop in Wekweètì, which will be done in collaboration with GNWT-ENR trapper-training expertise. The workshop will focus on three main subjects; traditionally accepted methods for handling wolves, successful harvesting techniques and financially successful skinning techniques. Therefore, we will invite three experts; an elder, a harvester and a skinner.

The TG will also expand on the training workshops by providing logistical support and organization for community-based wolf hunts on the winter range of the Bathurst herd. Because this is a community-based program with a focus on developing and increasing hunter participation, the main indicators of success will be the:

- Number of Tłıchq hunters trained;
- Total hunter effort through the winter season (i.e., number of active hunters and their time spent on the land and/or kilometers-areas traveled by month); and
- Number of wolves harvested from the winter range of the Bathurst herd. Additional information will include sex, location, and condition of harvested wolves.

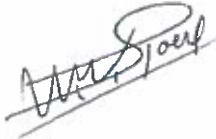
From a Tłıchq community perspective, general measures of success will include the education of hunters in traditional wolf harvesting practices, and the participation of Tłıchq harvesters on the land and active participants in caribou and predator management.

TG does not expect results of the Pilot Project to stop or reverse the decline of the Bathurst herd on its own. TG expects that a wolf management proposal will be developed collaboratively with ENR for submission to the WRRB as a result of the feasibility assessment of predator management options, which will establish numerical objectives and provide methodological recommendations for wolf removals and monitoring.

Due to the many potential factors that may affect the Bathurst caribou across its annual range, we have no illusions of directly attributing the potential success of this small Pilot Project to the health of the Bathurst herd.

However, we suggest that meaningful community hunter education and participation in wolf harvesting is a key step towards community acceptance and implementation of any broader predator management actions. If indicators of success are positive, we would consider expansion of the community-based program.

Sincerely,



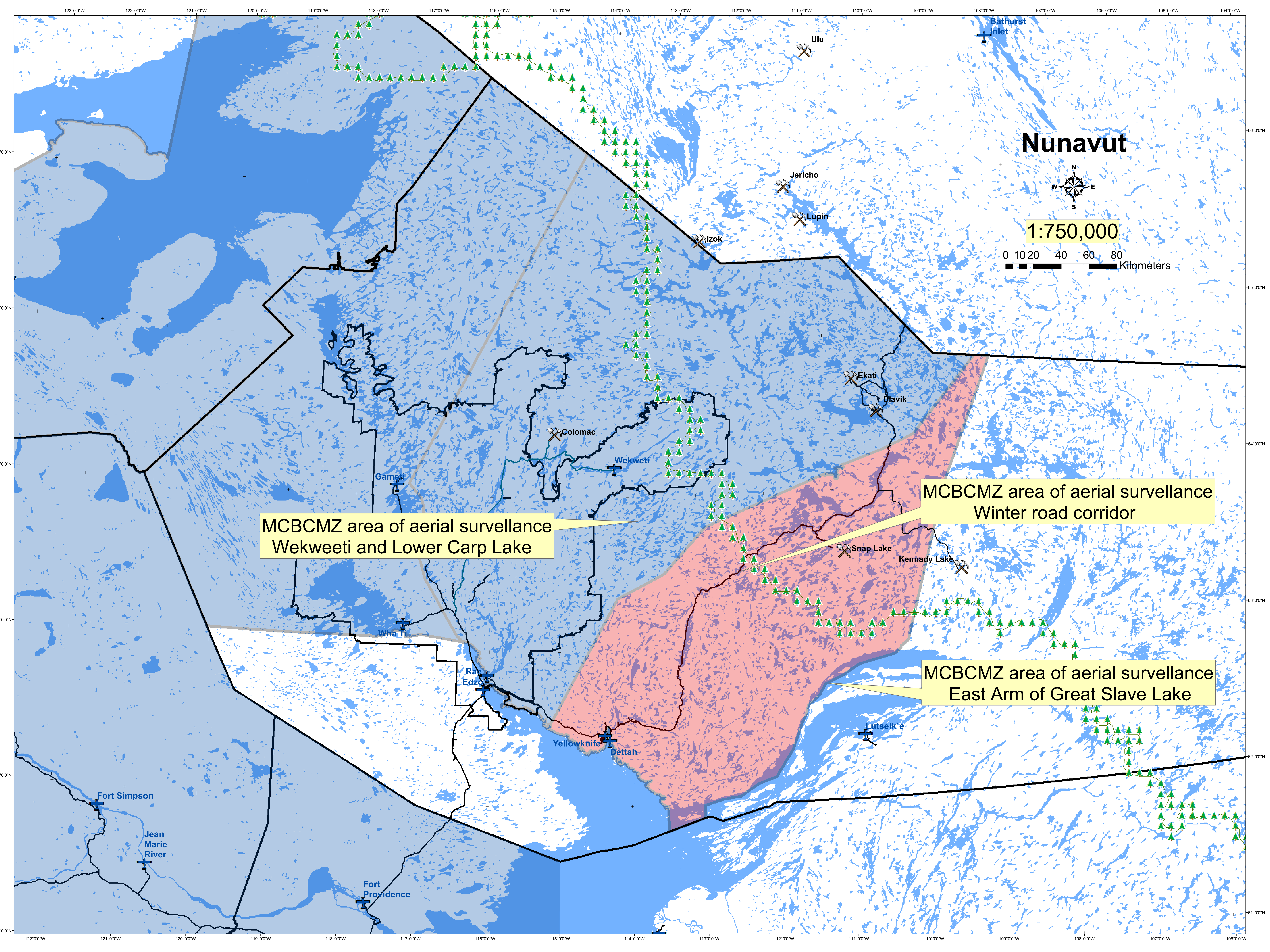
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Attachment

- c. Mr. Gary Bohnet, Principal Secretary
- The Honourable Robert C. McLeod, Minister, ENR
- Ms. Shaleen Woodward, Acting Deputy Minister, DAAIR
- Dr. Erin Kelly, Acting Deputy Minister, ENR
- Mr. Fred Mandeville, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, ENR
- Ms. Lynda Yonge, Director, Wildlife, ENR
- Grand Chief Eddie Erasmus, TG
- Ms. Laura Duncan, Tłchq Executive Officer, TG
- Ms. Jody Pellissey, Executive Director, WRRB



# Nunavut



1:750,000

0 10 20 40 60 80 Kilometers

MCBCMZ area of aerial surveillance  
Wekweeti and Lower Carp Lake

MCBCMZ area of aerial surveillance  
Winter road corridor

MCBCMZ area of aerial surveillance  
East Arm of Great Slave Lake

Fort Simpson

Jean Marie River

Fort Providence

Rap Edzo

Wha Ti

Gameo

Yellowknife

Dettah

Wekweeti

Colomac

Snap Lake

Kennady Lake

Lutsel'e

Ekati

Dravik

Izok

Jericho

Lupin

Ulu

Bathurst Inlet