

Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar bears

Ilulissat, Greenland, 1-3 September 2015

Outcome of the Meeting

Introduction

The Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears was concluded in Oslo, Norway, on November 15th 1973. The Range States comprises Canada, Greenland, Norway, Russia, and the United States of America. The Range States have held meetings every two years beginning in 2007.

As agreed upon at previous meetings, the Range States, in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement, including Articles VIII and IX, decided that meetings under the Agreement should be held on a biennial schedule or otherwise as agreed to by the Parties.

Against this background and building on the outcome of the previous meeting the five Range States met in Ilulissat, Greenland on 01-03 September, 2015 with an objective to provide an update on the conservation measures for polar bears, review progress on the development of national action plans, finalize the Circumpolar Action Plan (CAP), review the recommendations from the trade working group and the work of the conflict working group.

At its 2009 meeting, the Range States recognized that climate change and the associated sea ice degradation is the most important long term threat to polar bears. This was reinforced during the country reports at this meeting and in the CAP.

Country Reports & Bilateral Efforts

Each country gave a 40 minute presentation that included an overview of the program and updates on implementation of the Agreement. These presentations will be available on the Range States' meeting website (www.polarbear2015.gl).

Updates on four bilateral efforts were given. The United States had one comment related to the Canada-United States (Inuvialuit-Inupiat Agreement) presentation. The United States and Canada noted they look forward to discussion over the next year on available scientific data and TEK, including understanding and reconciling differences between the two streams of information.

Conflict Working Group

Human-bear conflicts have been under investigation by the human-bear conflict working group since 2009. They were tasked with examining proactive strategies for mitigating these conflicts, including best practices. A database has been developed to use as a tool for analyzing conflict data at local and regional scales. The database helps to facilitate adaptive management of human-bear conflicts.

Membership of the Conflict Working Group was confirmed.

The two year implementation plan of the Conflict Working Group was endorsed. The plan includes finalization of a Data Sharing Agreement, Terms of Reference, and a Requirements Document, as well as continued work on the PBHIMS database to fully integrate international data. The Working Group requested commitment from the Range States for financial and human resources.

National Action Plans

Two Range States have finalized their National Action Plans, and three others are well underway in their efforts.

Canada's National Action plan will incorporate the management plans developed at the territorial and provincial level, and the National Conservation Strategy. It is scheduled for completion in 2016.

Norway published its National Action Plan in November 2013. The focus of the plan is knowledge-based adaptive management. Revision is scheduled for 2018.

Russia approved its National Strategy in 2010. Its focus is the conservation of existing polar bear populations, and minimization of anthropogenic factors on polar bear populations. It will be reviewed in 2020.

United States began working on its plan in 2010. The plan provides a mechanism to communicate the importance of reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, and is a guiding document for sustainable co-management of subsistence harvest in the United States. This plan will be finalized within 6 months.

Greenland's National Action plan is in development. Regulations, a quota system, a reporting system, and monitoring systems are all in place. TEK, sustainable hunting, and PBHIMS will be the focus of planning efforts in the near future.

The status of the development of the various national plans will be kept up to date on the Range State web site (currently www.polarbear2015.gl). This avoids the need to wait until the next Range State meeting in two years to share this information.

Report from the Trade Working Group

The Trade Working Group of the Polar Bear Range States proposed six recommendations regarding trade in polar bear for endorsement by the Range States. These recommendations result from completion of the Trade Working Group's project "International Cooperation for Better Enforcement, Reporting, and Data for Polar Bears". The trade working group also noted the completion of the trade report and indicated that the report is available in electronic format on the meeting website and on request (to Canada) in hard copies. The Range States endorsed the recommendations.

Circumpolar Action Plan (CAP)

In 2009 the parties agreed to develop a coordinated approach to conservation and management planning. Each Range State is developing or has developed its own national action plan. These form the basis of the CAP. Presenting and accepting the CAP at this Range State meeting meets the goal established in Moscow at the 2013 Range State meeting.

The CAP identifies key threats as climate change, human caused mortality, mineral and energy resource exploration and development, contaminants and pollution, shipping, tourism related activities, and disease and parasites. Its vision is to secure the long term persistence in the wild that represent the genetic, behavioral, life history, and ecological diversity of the species. This vision is supported by six objectives. A full review will be undertaken in 10 years, with a review of implementation actions at each Range State meeting. The Range States unanimously endorsed the CAP and thanked the working group for their significant work.

WWF congratulated the Range States on the CAP and noted that the ambitious, long-term nature of the document is a clear demonstration of the Range States' commitment to polar bear conservation and urged the Parties to provide adequate funding for implementation. Humane Society International (HSI) commended the group on the work that went into the CAP. HSI remains encouraged by the ten year plan.

Scientific Reports on Conservation Status and Research Efforts

PBSG provided a presentation on its status table, Red List Assessment update, and key scientific publications since the last Range States meeting. Their mission is to coordinate, synthesize and distribute scientific information necessary to guide the long-term viability of polar bears and their habitats. Canada asked the PBSG to develop advice on the type of survey that may be appropriate for the Arctic Basin, its priority, and likely costs.

Commitments to the CAP – 2 Year Implementation Schedule

The ten year action table (Appendix 1) is divided into the four strategic approaches. Each of these has actions and sub-actions. There are six objectives that the actions and sub-actions address. There are a total of 61 different sub-actions to be undertaken over ten years, with 19 actions being identified as priorities for the next two years.

The Range States endorsed an implementation plan detailing commitments for the next two year period. Working groups were created to accomplish the two year actions, focusing on Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Communication, Trade & Wildlife Enforcement Network and Trade, Operations, Protocols and Procedures of the Range States, CAP Implementation, and human-bear conflicts. Range States will report at the 2017 meeting on the progress made on those items.

Operating Mechanisms

The Range States' recognized that the current ad hoc voluntary working group is not adapted to the needs of the implementation of the CAP and as such want to ensure that adequate resources are identified for this. The Range States agreed to create a working group that will prepare recommendations within 12 months for the consideration of the Range States. The mandate of this working group will consider options for the structure, operating mechanisms, procedures and protocols, and finding methods to best facilitate the current and anticipated work of the Range States in implementing the CAP and the Polar Bear Agreement.

Earlier in the meeting, IFAW suggested that the Parties develop a Terms of Reference for observers. The working group on operating mechanisms will include this task in their work.

Canada and the United States will co-chair the working group.

The Range States agreed to have further discussions about how countries make changes to subpopulation boundaries as well as how those are communicated to the PBSG.

Cooperation with Other Relevant Multilateral Structures

IUCN General Assembly 2016. Range States agreed to seek support from IUCN for implementation of the CAP.

IUCN-PBSG. The Range States reaffirmed their support for the PBSG as an independent scientific advisory body. They agreed to continue discussions about the structure and relationships between PBSG, PBTC, and Range States' scientists. Canada will be submitting a proposal to PBSG to discuss enhanced participation and/or communication.

CITES. It was noted that during their country report, the US notified the Range States that the US was likely to submit a proposal to the 17th CITES Conference of the Parties to transfer the polar bear from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I. This proposal is based on concerns the US continues to have about the impacts of commercial international trade in polar bears on the long term survival of the species. The US clarified that no position has yet been finalized and welcomed input and information from the Range States.

Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Last year the CMS listed polar bears on their Appendix II. Norway has received a letter from CMS offering assistance on the issue of polar bears and climate change. Implementation Team will consider this offer, confer with their Head of Delegations, and report back to the group. All the Range States are open to exploring how possible collaboration with CMS could facilitate implementation of components of the CAP.

Appendix 1. 10 Year Table

Appendix II. Trade Working Group Recommendations