

News Release

Minister Shewchuk: GN Stood Firm against US CITES Proposal

IQALUIT, Nunavut (March 19, 2010, Iqaluit) - The US Proposal to ban trade in polar bears was defeated yesterday at the United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meetings in Doha, Qatar. This is welcome news for the Canadian delegation, led by Environment Canada, and comprised of Nunavut representatives from the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), and Regional Wildlife Organizations (RWOs).

Over the past few months, the Government of Nunavut has worked in collaboration with the federal government and other co-management stakeholders to lobby CITES parties, and inform international audiences of the futility of this US proposal. A letter sent to the 175 CITES nations early this year pointed out how polar bears do not meet the clear criteria for up-listing to Appendix I under CITES.

"The US proposal was a misguided and potentially counterproductive effort. It intervened in matters which the co-management partners in Canada have well in-hand," said Nunavut Minister of Environment Daniel Shewchuk. "When this proposal was announced, we in Nunavut did not sit back. We stood firm against this proposal, on the grounds that trade is not a significant threat to polar bears."

Had the proposal been accepted, it would have had negative consequences for Nunavut communities, and harvesters and sport hunt outfitters in particular. A key component of Nunavut lobby efforts has been to effectively communicate the importance of the polar bear harvest to Inuit cultural identity and economic well-being.

Polar bear co-management partners see this decision as a positive step in demonstrating the effectiveness of Nunavut's wildlife management system, which ensures public engagement, support, and involvement in critical wildlife decisions.

The proposal was defeated with 48 in favour, 62 opposed and 11 abstentions. The final decision, which is expected to be consistent with the vote, will be made on March 25 during the CITES' plenary session.

"The outcome reached in Doha confirms that Nunavut will not cave in to international pressure and misguided attempts to intervene in conservation initiatives. We have communicated to the world that Nunavut will continue to manage our polar bear populations sustainably," said Minister Shewchuk.

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Communications 2010-17-C