



## **Inuit bring evidence and enlightenment to EU polar bear information sessions**

December 7, 2012 — Ottawa, Ontario — Representatives from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and the Government of Nunavut (GN), concluded a productive week of meetings in Brussels, Belgium, aimed at persuading Members of the European Parliament to vote against a United States (US) proposal to transfer polar bears from Appendix II to Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES).

“Canada has one of the most advanced and successful polar bear management systems in the world – one that increasingly recognizes and includes Inuit as partners,” said National Inuit Leader Terry Audla, President of ITK. “So it is incumbent upon us to share our unique expertise with representatives of our fellow CITES member states – many of whom who have never experienced the beauty of an Arctic winter and who have perhaps never seen a polar bear. Our job is to educate, to enlighten and to ensure that members vote with the evidence, not against it.”

“Trade has never been identified as a threat to polar bear populations,” said Nunavut Minister of Environment, James Arreak. “This week in Brussels, Government of Nunavut (GN) officials delivered the message that our polar bear management system is based on effective conservation principles that include the sustainable harvest of polar bears. The GN hopes that the US proposal will be rejected and that the management and conservation of this species will be carried out amongst its range states.”

An Appendix I CITES listing would effectively designate polar bears as threatened with extinction and prompt international trade restrictions of the highest level. It would severely impact the well-managed and sustainable harvest and trade that serves as a lifeline in many Inuit communities.

In September, a delegation representing ITK and the GN, along with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the Inuvialuit Game Council and the Government of Canada, travelled to Washington DC to lobby Members of the U.S. Congress and Senate against up listing.

In spite of those interventions, the U.S. government proceeded with its proposal, which will go to a vote among CITES member states during their next CITES Conference of the Parties (COP) in March 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand.

This week’s Brussels visit included meetings with individual Members of the European Parliament, and representatives from the European Union’s foreign affairs branch, the European External Action Service. Audla also addressed a conference organized by the European Parliament called “Would a Trade Ban Improve Polar Bear Conservation?”

“For the answer to that question, simply look to the results of the 2010 COP in Doha, Qatar, the last time the U.S. proposed up listing,” Audla said. “States overwhelmingly rejected the motion because there was absolutely no evidence to indicate that up listing would produce any actual conservation benefits. To this day there is not a scientist who would argue that the evidence warrants up listing. A trade ban, in fact, is nothing but a distraction preventing us from taking action on climate change.”

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