



COMPENDIUM OF CANADA'S ENGAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS AND INSTRUMENTS

Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears

SUBJECT CATEGORY:

Biodiversity / Ecosystems

TYPE OF AGREEMENT / INSTRUMENT:

Multilateral

FORM:

Legally-binding treaty

STATUS:

- Signed by Canada: November 15, 1973
- Ratified by Canada: December 14, 1974

LEAD & PARTNER DEPARTMENTS:

Lead: Environment and Climate Change Canada

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Web Links:

- [Conservation of Polar Bears in Canada](#)
- [Text of the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears](#)
- [Circumpolar Action Plan](#)

Contacts:

[ECCC Inquiry Centre](#)

COMPENDIUM EDITION:

January 2020

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

The Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears came into effect on May 26, 1976 in an effort to protect the species through a coordinated approach by the five polar bear range states (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russia), Norway, Greenland (Denmark), the United States, Canada).

The Agreement is important to Canada because a number of the threats to polar bear are best addressed through collaboration amongst Range States (for example sharing of information about best management practices).

Canada is a proud co-author of the Range States' Circumpolar Action, the first range wide conservation strategy for the species. Canada continues its support for the Plan as an active participant in all of the Circumpolar Action Plan [Working Groups](#) including co-chairing the Communications and Traditional Ecological Knowledge working groups.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives laid out in the Agreement are as follows:

- Recognize the special responsibilities and special interests of the States of the Arctic Region in relation to the protection of the fauna and flora of the Arctic Region;
- Recognize that the polar bear is a significant resource of the Arctic Region which requires additional protection;
- Decided that such protection should be achieved through co-ordinated national measures taken by the States of the Arctic Region;
- Desire to take immediate action to bring further conservation and management measures into effect.

KEY ELEMENTS

The Agreement requires that the Range States take polar bears only when permitted (as outlined in the Agreement), protect the polar bear ecosystems and habitat as well as undertake research and monitoring efforts to ensure the persistence of the species in their range.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The five parties to the 1973 Agreement recognize that polar bears are important for people in northern communities, the Range States and the world. The nature and pace of change in the Arctic requires action locally, nationally and internationally. The five Range State countries will continue to work collaboratively on both new and ongoing conservation initiatives.

CANADA'S INVOLVEMENT

This Agreement is important to Canada because it is home to two-thirds of the world's polar bear population. Indigenous groups in the North continue to hunt polar bears for subsistence and traditional purposes. This Agreement supports sustainable use by Indigenous people while also helping Canada meet obligations under the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which requires Canada to maintain a healthy polar bear population for subsistence harvest to continue. The 1973 Agreement engages Canada in conversations about the species and its population status and trends in other areas of its range.

This Agreement is implemented in Canada in a combined effort by Indigenous Hunting and Trapping organisations and Wildlife Management Boards, provincial and territorial governments, and the federal government (as per the Land Claims Agreements).

RESULTS / PROGRESS

Activities

In September 2015, the Parties to the Agreement released a ten year Circumpolar Action Plan for polar

bears. The Plan is divided into two parts. The first outlines species information, key threats and the existing domestic management regimes of the Range States. The second focuses on the individual actions that will be undertaken to mitigate threats. The actions are divided into two-year work plans and focus on work most appropriately addressed at the international level.

The five Representative Parties [met in Fairbanks, Alaska](#), USA, from February 2-4, 2018, with the objectives of: providing updates on polar bear research, management, and conservation efforts; sharing of information related to national or international projects from which the Polar Bear Range States may benefit; reviewing [progress made on the 2-year Circumpolar Action Plan \(CAP\) Implementation Plan for 2015-2017](#) adopted at the previous meeting; finalizing and adopting the 2-year CAP Implementation Plan for 2018-2020; finalizing and adopting Range States Rules of Procedure; reviewing options available for Range States Secretariat support; and finalizing and adopting Terms of Reference for scientific advice.

A mid-term review of the ten year Circumpolar Action Plan will be completed in January 2020 and the outcomes and recommendations of the mid-term review will be considered at the next Meeting of the Parties, which is scheduled for March 4 to 6, 2020 in Norway. The purpose of the Meeting of the Parties in 2020 is to: provide an update on the conservation status and management of polar bears and their habitat in each of the Range States; provide an update on the collaborative efforts to implement the Circumpolar Action Plan for polar bears; and discuss other key issues related to polar bear conservation.