



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:

July 2022

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 international 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 Plan (CAP), 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 because Canada is home to two-thirds of the world's polar bears. 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 its obligations under the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which aims to ensure that international trade of listed species does not threaten their survival. The 1973 Agreement engages Canada in conversations about the species and its population status and trends on an international scale.

This Agreement is implemented in Canada in a combined effort by Indigenous organizations, Wildlife Management Boards, Advisory Councils, 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 (2015-2025) 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 Svalbard, Norway](#) on March 4-6, 2020, 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 2018-2020](#) adopted at the previous meeting; finalizing and adopting the 2-year CAP Implementation Plan for 2020-2023; and reviewing outcomes and recommendations arising from the CAP midterm review, which occurred in January 2020.

Canada is currently the Chair of the Polar Bear Range States, and the next Meeting of the Parties will occur in Canada in spring 2023. The purpose of the Meeting of the Parties will be 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; finalize and adopt the two-year CAP Implementation Plan for 2023-2025, and discuss other key issues related to polar bear conservation and management.