

Canada, Greenland accord to protect polar bears

October 31 2009



File picture shows two Polar Bears in Manitoba, Canada. Canada and Greenland agreed on a series of measures aimed at protecting shared populations of polar bears which roam between the Nunavut territory and the huge arctic island, officials said.

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Canada's Environment Minister Jim Prentice made the announcement during a conference call from Kangerluusuaq, [Greenland](#), where he signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) Friday with Greenland's

Minister of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture, Ane Hansen and Prentice's Nunavut territory counterpart Daniel Shewchuk.

The deal proposes the creation of a joint committee that would recommend a total allowable -- and sustainable -- annual polar bear harvest and a fair division of the harvest.

Hunting polar bears has been banned since 1973 but the Arctic's indigenous peoples are exempt out of respect for their ancestral traditions, despite scientists' objections over how the quotas have been divided.

The committee, to include members of remote northern Canada's aboriginal Inuit organizations, would also coordinate science, traditional knowledge and outreach activities.

"The government of [Canada](#) is committed to working collaboratively to protect one of Canada's true natural, and national, symbols. An iconic animal, whose rare and rugged beauty stands as a stark reminder that Canada is one of the world's true Nordic nations," Prentice said.

Hansen stressed it was "important that traditional knowledge is used together with science" in the process, while Shewchuk said the MOU "will help us make the wisest possible management decisions for our [polar bear](#) populations."

Canada has some 15,500 polar bears, divided into thirteen distinct populations. Two of them, living on the ice sheets of Kane Basin and Baffin Bay, are trans-boundary and shared between Nunavut and Greenland.

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Citation: Canada, Greenland accord to protect polar bears (2009, October 31) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-10-canada-greenland-accord-polar.html>

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