

Russian Arctic archipelago sounds alarm over aggressive polar bears

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A Russian Arctic archipelago on Saturday declared an emergency situation over an "invasion" of dozens of aggressive polar bears that have entered homes and public buildings.

Russia's northeastern Novaya Zemlya archipelago, which has a population of around 3,000 people, has appealed for help to tackle "a mass invasion of polar bears into inhabited areas," regional authorities said in a statement.

Russian authorities have so far refused permission to shoot the bears but are sending a commission to investigate the situation and have not ruled out a cull.

Polar bears are affected by global warming with melting Arctic ice forcing them to spend more time on land where they compete for food.

They are recognised as an [endangered species](#) in Russia and hunting them is banned.

Russia has [air force](#) and air defence troops based on Novaya Zemlya.

Since December, 52 polar bears have regularly visited the archipelago's main settlement, Belushya Guba, with some displaying "aggressive behaviour," local official Alexander Minayev said in a report to regional authorities.

This included "attacks on people and entering residential homes and [public buildings](#)," said Minayev, the deputy chief of the local administration.

"There are constantly 6 to 10 bears inside the settlement," he said.

"People are scared, they are afraid to leave their homes... parents are frightened to let their children go to schools and kindergartens."

The head of the local administration Zhigansha Musin said that the numbers of polar bears were unprecedented.

"I've been on Novaya Zemlya since 1983 and there's never been such a mass invasion of polar bears," he told regional officials.

Bears are constantly inside a military garrison and "literally chase people" he said as well as going into the entrances of blocks of flats.

Local officials complained that measures to scare off polar bears such as vehicle and dog patrols have not been effective as polar bears feel secure and no longer react.

The federal environmental resources agency has refused to issue licences to shoot the most aggressive bears.

A working group of regional and [federal officials](#) is set to visit the archipelago to assess the situation

and the measures taken so far.

The Arkhangelsk regional authorities, which oversee Novaya Zemlya, said that if all else failed "shooting the animals could be the only possible forced measure."

In January, a defence ministry official said that hundreds of disused military buildings had been demolished on Novaya Zemlya because [polar bears](#) were settling inside them.

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