

Joint ITK / ICC Press Release

Canadian Inuit Welcome US Support to Import Legally Hunted Polar Bear Skins

Ottawa, Ontario – Tuesday May 17, 2011 - Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Canada welcomed the support signalled by members of a U.S. House subcommittee on natural resources to pass a Bill (H.R. 991) that would allow for the importation of 41 legally hunted Polar Bear skins. The specimens have been held in storage in Canada since the U.S. listed Polar Bears as Threatened on its Endangered Species Act (ESA) 3 years ago.

The 2008 ESA decision triggered a mechanism within the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) that designated Polar Bears as a "depleted species", disallowing American hunters from bringing back their legally hunted Polar Bear skins. The 41 specimens in question were obtained prior to May 15, 2008. The Bill, if passed, will amend the MMPA to allow these specimens in since they were taken before the law came into effect.

"It's clear and simple - the hunters should be allowed to bring home the polar bears that they had paid for and legally hunted here in Canada prior to the coming into effect of the 2008 import closure," said ITK President, Mary Simon. "There is no conservation issue with the 41 polar bear specimens that are just sitting in storage, so they should be returned to their rightful owners."

"Inuit continue to emphasize that the management regimes used to regulate these hunts are among the best in the world, and our Inuit hunter guides are the true polar bear experts," said ICC Canada President Duane Smith. "It would be wasteful to discard the polar bear skins that are just sitting in limbo. They should amend the MMPA immediately and send them across the border without penalty or incident."

Polar Bear are one of only a few species listed under the US ESA primarily due to the effects of climate change and its perceived role in the reduction of habitat, namely the melting of arctic sea ice. Polar bear conservation hunts are strictly managed under Canadian wildlife management systems. The strength and legitimacy of these systems was emphasized last week by the Acting Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service who described Canada at the hearing on H.R. 991 as "one of the best conservation partners that we have."

Inuit question the ethics of opponents who argue that the Bill would threaten US global conservation efforts. Canadian Inuit communities are involved in the careful management of conservation hunts which bring economic benefit to entire communities, while simultaneously guarding Inuit values in subsistence hunting. Inuit are confident that most Americans would support these values.

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