

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
5<sup>TH</sup> COUNCIL, 33<sup>RD</sup> SESSION**

**RECOMMENDATION TO  
COUNCIL NO. 6-33**

**TABLED ON NOVEMBER 4, 1966**



October 24, 1966.  
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Council.

**NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL NO. 6-33  
(Second Session 1966)**

*Tabled on November 4, 1966*

**POLAR BEAR CONSERVATION**

**DISPOSITION**

Tabled	To Committee	Accepted as Read	Accepted as Amended	Deferred (to Session)	Rejected	Noted not Considered

## POLAR BEAR CONSERVATION

### I Canadian Wildlife Service Report

During the past two years national and international concern has been expressed about the continued well-being of polar bears. The total world population of the bears is thought to be between 13,000 and 18,000 animals, of which Canada has about 6,000. The concern has arisen because of the high annual kill of the species throughout the world. The Canadian kill is nearly 600 polar bears a year.

Because of world wide concern, the First International Meeting on the Polar Bear was held in September, 1965, at Fairbanks, Alaska. Delegates from Denmark, Norway, the U.S.S.R., the United States and Canada attended the meeting.

A number of important conclusions were reached, one being that each nation, within whose territory polar bears are found, should take steps to conserve the species until more precise management, based on research findings, can be applied. The Canadian Wildlife Service is actively engaged in studying Canadian polar bears. A conclusion already reached is that the present annual kill is about the maximum the population can stand. The increasingly widespread use of motorized tobaggans, such as skidoos, presents a real threat to polar bear survival. There is evidence that in 1965, on a weekend hunt, two wage-earning Eskimos using motor tobaggans killed ten polar bears. In other instances, there is evidence that only hides were removed from the bears shot, the meat being left behind.

In an effort to counter increased hunting pressure on polar bears stimulated by rise in pelt values and mechanized transport, and to further conserve the species, the following recommendations for revisions to polar bear legislation are suggested:

- (1) That a closed season on polar bears be enforced from May 15 to October 1. Polar bears are most vulnerable during this period when they can be hunted in the open water from boats. The moult occurs during this period and pelts are generally in poor condition (the hair tends to become thin, especially on the belly, and the pelts are often stained yellowish-brown). Similar closed seasons are in effect in north-eastern Greenland and Alaska. The length of the closed season can be varied as the situation alters.
- (2) That hunting of mothers with cubs up to two years of age and of cubs up to two years of age be forbidden. Very often the pelts of younger animals are not prime, their fur being short and sometimes scraggy in appearance. Cubs are known to be dependent on mothers for milk at least up to 11 months, and generally they depend on the mother for learning to the age of 18 months. During this period they receive survival training and it is important that it is not interrupted. Of course, the cubs are extremely vulnerable when first venturing out on their own and should have protection into the first winter of their independence (i.e. to December 1 of their second year). Objections to this suggested revision might be on the basis that it is difficult to recognize a two year old polar bear in the field. This is true at times but they can usually be recognized because they are slightly smaller than their mothers and have a definitely

gangling appearance when compared to adult bears. One of the basic reasons for this revision is to allow as many young bears as possible to reach adulthood, at which time, if killed, they may be of much greater economic value (larger, better pelts; more meat). Alaska has similar legislation.

- (3) That hunters on Banks Island, Victoria Island and in the District of Mackenzie not be exempted from Northwest Territories game laws (see Schedule B, (6), forbidding killing of cubs up to a year of age and their mothers, or the suggested revision in (2), should it be accepted).

As more research data becomes available from the Canadian Wildlife Service studies, better polar bear management programs can be developed to ensure sound conservation of the species combined with maximum returns to the Eskimos.

## II      Recommendations for Polar Bear Conservation

Concern has often been expressed about the status of the polar bear, and as a result meetings on international levels were held to discuss research and preservation methods. The general consensus is that polar bear are in danger of over-exploitation and it might be just a matter of time before drastic control measures will have to be initiated to avoid extermination of the species.

The Northwest Territories Game Management Service, responsible for the management of game species, faces a rather difficult problem in this respect, or rather two problems. First, drastically restricting the take of polar bear or, in extreme cases, prohibiting its kill, will seriously affect the already depressed economic situation; secondly, a continuance of the present practice, according to which each holder of a General Hunting Licence is entitled to bag any number of polar bear, may possibly lead to a gradual attrition of this species. Consequently, a solution will have to be found permitting an adequate harvest without jeopardizing the polar bear population.

The Director of the Canadian Wildlife Service has drawn attention to the polar bear problem and has made a number of recommendations which should be implemented without any further delay. The most important recommendations are:

1. to establish a closed season on polar bear from May 15 to October 1;
2. to prohibit the take of females and cubs up to two years; and,
3. that hunters on Banks Island, Victoria Island and in the District of Mackenzie not be exempted from the prohibition listed under 2.

There can be no doubt enforcing these regulations will result in a reduced kill. However, pelt prices can be expected to increase. This in turn may stimulate Eskimo hunters to concentrate on polar bear during the open season so that the kill may not be as much reduced in future as we would hope.

The present steady increase in numbers of General Hunting Licence Holders (which will come to an end if proposals in another paper before the Council are adopted) will probably account for an even higher kill within a few years so that we would soon again face the problem we are now trying to solve. It should therefore be evident that the above recommendations are not a permanent solution.

In order to engage in a realistic polar bear management program, by taking the requirements of the indigenous people as well as the preservation of polar bear into account, it is recommended that annual quotas for the various Game Management Zones and for the settlements therein be established. The advantages of established quotas are listed below:

1. The kill can be regulated and can always be maintained on a tolerable level. The continuing studies of the species by the Canadian Wildlife Service and the surveys by the Game Management Service will help to establish meaningful quotas.
2. As the initial quotas would naturally be lower than the present kill, the Northwest Territories cannot be criticized for managing a natural resource irresponsibly. Any reduction of the

present kill must indicate genuine concern in preserving this remarkable but vulnerable species.

3. Eskimo people will become aware of the fact that animal populations are exhaustible and must be managed wisely. This should result in acceptance and understanding of new management techniques.
4. Allotting quotas to individual settlements might be the first step for introducing sport hunting, if such is desired by the Eskimos.

The provision of a quota would allow the local Eskimos to make the best possible use of their animals. They would perhaps choose to fill the quota themselves, or use all or part of it to attract sport-hunters. In any case financial returns will increase, and control will be better.

Compared with the advantages, the disadvantages are negligible; they are encountered only in the administration of the recommended system. Initially, there will be some difficulty to inform the Eskimo properly, to assign quotas and to explain the meaning and purpose of the system to them. Proper enforcement may also remain complicated during the first years. However, R.C.M.P. Officers, Area Administrators, Teachers and others have contact with all settlements (at least a few times during the year). In addition, more Game Officers will be employed and stationed in the more important settlements.

#### Recommendations

The Commissioner therefore, recommends;

- (1) The immediate adoption of the Canadian Wildlife Service's three recommendations.
- (2) An annual quota for polar bear be established.
- (3) The quota system become effective in 1967 to permit ample time for properly publicizing and explaining the new system.