

Report of the Extraordinary Meeting of the IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group

24-27 October 2012

Oslo, Norway

BACKGROUND

The Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) is one of 120 specialist groups within the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/who_we_are/about_the_species_survival_commission/). Since the signing of the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears (Agreement), the PBSG has provided regular updates on the worldwide status of polar bear and has played a vital role in interpreting conservation issues pertaining to the Agreement. Specifically, the PBSG has long been recognized as the authoritative body for reviewing and presenting the “best available scientific data” necessary to inform sound conservation of polar bears and their habitats, pursuant to Article II of the Agreement.

In 2009, the polar bear Range States (Parties to the 1973 Agreement) met to revitalize cooperation between the Range State governments and formalize international conservation efforts. Following the 2009 Range States meeting, the PBSG officially accepted the role of providing independent scientific advice regarding polar bear conservation to the Range States.

Between 24 and 27 October 2012, PBSG members met in Oslo, Norway, to discuss, revise and formalize the mission statement, objectives, and membership guidelines for the PBSG. These steps were taken to clarify the PBSG’s role as a provider of independent scientific advice, to assure PBSG independence from policy agendas, and achieve better structural alignment of PBSG with IUCN/SSC bylaws. The following text summarizes the principle outcomes of this extraordinary meeting of the PBSG.

MISSION

The PBSG discussed and agreed upon the following mission statement and objectives.

Mission Statement: To coordinate, synthesize, and distribute scientific information necessary to guide the long-term viability of polar bears and their habitats.

Objectives:

1. Promote and develop scientific information necessary for the long-term conservation of polar bears.
2. Communicate scientific findings on polar bear conservation.
3. Promote inter-jurisdictional research, monitoring, and management of polar bears and their habitats.
4. Coordinate distribution of scientific information necessary to manage traditional harvests of polar bears.
5. Identify anthropogenic threats to polar bears and define possible solutions.
6. Provide scientific advice regarding policies and actions concerning polar bears.
7. Assure actions of the PBSG reflect all tenets of the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears.

ADVISORY ROLE

The PBSG considered its role as the independent scientific advisor to the polar bear Range States. There was consensus to continue in this capacity with the primary responsibility of providing objective scientific input. The group identified a need to formally clarify mutual expectations between the PBSG and the Range States.

MEMBERSHIP

The PBSG revised membership qualifications to ensure consistency with its scientific responsibilities, as outlined in the mission statement, and with other IUCN Specialist Groups. The following membership statement was unanimously approved.

Membership Statement:

1. The PBSG is focused on having an active and widely skilled membership that is fully representative and supportive of its scientific mission and activities.
2. The Chair of the PBSG is nominated and approved by the members, and appointed by IUCN.
3. The PBSG Chair appoints members on the basis of their direct and relevant scientific knowledge. Members will provide independent scientific expertise while serving in the capacity of a PBSG member.

4. The PBSG will consist of 15 to 35 members, including a minimum of three representatives from each Range State, and will strive to ensure international balance. All members have an equal vote.
5. Chair and member appointments will normally be made on a four-year cycle, and will coincide with the timing of the ordinary meeting. Consistent with IUCN procedures, the PBSG membership will be dissolved and members reappointed at the end of each cycle. It should not be assumed that continued appointment is automatic. For example, members that no longer support the mission and objectives of the PBSG, or those that have been inactive, may not have their membership renewed.
6. The Chair may choose to appoint a Deputy Chair or co-Chair.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The PBSG agreed to develop Terms of Reference prior to the next ordinary meeting, modelled after those of other IUCN Specialist Groups, and including topics such as the role of invited specialists and observers, establishment of subcommittees, rules of procedures, and protocols.

OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING

- The PBSG unanimously nominated and approved Dag Vongraven as Chair until the next ordinary meeting and through the following cycle.
- The following decisions were made regarding publication of the proceedings from ordinary meetings of the PBSG:
 - Proceedings will be produced in electronic format.
 - Proceedings should still be published by the IUCN system as an occasional paper.
 - There will be firm deadlines and formatting rules for reports contributed to the proceedings. The Chair will assist with compliance. Previous editors should send documents and templates to future editors to assist with formatting.
 - The PBSG selected a subcommittee for coordinating production of the next proceedings.
 - The PBSG agreed that the Status Table will be completed by the end of the meeting, and will be posted on the website shortly after the meeting. Minutes from the meeting will be completed as soon as possible.
- The PBSG reviewed the structure of the Status Table and made several modifications.
- The PBSG identified individuals to assist the Chair in updating the PBSG website.

- The PBSG identified subcommittees to lead efforts related to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the IUCN Red List assessment. There were also subcommittees on management, climate change, pollution, membership, status table, website, and the proceedings.
- The PBSG agreed that the IUCN Red List reassessment at latest will be undertaken by 2018 (10-year cycle).
- A subcommittee will draft a press release about the circumpolar monitoring plan.
- The PBSG agreed that the next ordinary meeting will occur in June 2014 and will include invited specialists.
- The PBSG expressed its gratitude to the Norwegian Polar Institute and the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment for supporting and hosting this extraordinary meeting.

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AGENDA

1. INTRODUCTION

- * Chairman's welcome
- * Comments to the agenda
- * Decision on report format and output from the meeting
- * Thor Larsen (invited speaker): The history of the group – the past
- * Ian Stirling: From the past to the present – challenges

2. PBSG BASICS

- * Mission/objectives
- * Relation to TEK
- * Secretariat needs
- * Dena Cator (IUCN): How do other SGs do things?

3. MEMBERSHIP

4. NEW GUIDELINES

5. WORK PROCESS AND PRODUCTS

- * Proceedings - improvements
- * Status table – how do we make this process more efficient?

6. RED LIST ASSESSMENT

7. CITES

8. MONITORING PLAN – WHAT NEXT

9. WEBSITE REVIEW

10. TOWARDS NEXT REGULAR MEETING

- * Management options – rapid change
- * Oil & shipping
- * Tourism

11. PBSG 16th MEETING 2013

- * If, where and when

12. CONCLUDING REMARKS