



HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL
UNITED KINGDOM

Richard Benyon MP
Environment Minister
DEFRA
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

January 2013

Dear Minister,

Threatened polar bears need UK government support

The future survival of the iconic polar bear is threatened like never before from habitat loss through climate change, pollution and Arctic development. Eight of the world's twelve polar bear populations for which data exist are in decline and scientists predict that two thirds of polar bears could disappear altogether by 2050. Yet unbelievably Canada, home to around two thirds of the world's remaining polar bears, still allows international commercial trade in the animals and their parts. Around 600 polar bears are killed by hunters in Canada every year, and in the decade to 2010 more than 30,000 polar bears or polar bear parts were traded globally, mostly as trophies, rugs and ornaments.

Polar bears are listed as "vulnerable" on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) 'Red List' of threatened species, and whilst habitat loss from climate change is undoubtedly their top threat, international commercial trade from hunting is also a significant factor. U.S. Geological Survey models estimate that by the middle of this century, polar bears are likely to lose up to 70% of their sea-ice habitat on which they depend for their survival. If the sea ice continues to retreat at the speed witnessed during the last few years, the situation for polar bears will soon become critical and we could see a dramatic and sudden decline in polar bear numbers.

Canada's commercial polar bear hunting for the global market, with quotas often set well above scientific recommendations, is unsustainable in these dire circumstances and needs to end now if these animals are to stand any chance of survival given the enormous challenges they face.

At the upcoming meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Thailand in March 2013, we have a vital opportunity to afford polar bears the protection they need. Recognising the precarious position of the polar bear, the United States – backed by Russia - has proposed that polar bears be uplisted from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I, effectively banning all international commercial trade. We urge you to do

Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty
Worldwide

everything you can to actively support this proposal at EU-level discussions and to encourage your EU counterparts to do likewise. We are aware that the UK and the EU voted against a similar proposal at the 2010 CITES meeting. Opposition to the proposal by the 27 EU members was a crucial factor in its defeat.

In the coming weeks, you will be representing the UK as EU Member States discuss how to vote on this issue at CITES. Whilst action we take now to tackle climate change may take years to benefit polar bears, ending the global trade will give them immediate and much-needed respite. We join Humane Society International in urging you to be a champion for the polar bear at CITES 2013.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Jones – Executive Director, HSI UK

Chris Packham – Naturalist & broadcaster

Brian Blessed – Actor

Mark Carwardine – Biologist & broadcaster

Martin Clunes – Actor

Bear Grylls – Adventurer & broadcaster

Joanna Lumley – Actor

Joseph Fiennes – Actor