

## CITES AND POLAR BEARS UPHOLDING REAL NATURE CONSERVATION

**7 March 2013, Bangkok** - FACE welcomes today's decision by the world's largest wildlife trade summit to continue to allow international trade in polar bear products from sustainable hunting.

The attempt by the US to ban such trade was voted down by delegates in a Committee of the 16th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) held in Bangkok, Thailand. This decision confirms that international trade of some 300 bears annually - out of an estimated total population of 20,000 to 25,000, some 1.2-1.5% - is not a threat to the polar bear.

The aim of the convention is to regulate international trade in species, including hunting trophies, so that trade does not threaten their survival. FACE participates as the voice of European hunters who have a vested interest in ensuring the long-term survival of wildlife and so look to ensure that decisions are science-based and respect the agreed biological and trade criteria of CITES.

The US never claimed the polar bear to be threatened. Its proposal was based on a purely speculative assumption that global warming could be projected as leading to a population decline of sufficient level to threaten the species in the future and if this was so, international trade may be projected as contributing further to this problem. Such a speculative approach finds no support in CITES.

Both delegates at the meeting and commentators in the press have suggested that the real underlying motive behind the US proposal was to compensate for a perceived lack of own action on climate change and to gain environmental credibility on Arctic issues. As a result of melting ice, the Arctic is expected to grow in economic importance in the coming years with the opening of potential new maritime trade routes and exploitation possibilities of natural resources such as drilling for oil and gas.

Instead of gaining support, the US seems to have managed to drill a hole in its own credibility in nature conservation. Its proposal, based on political motive, met fierce resistance from Parties and the large conservation-orientated organisations, such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), TRAFFIC, WWF and the CITES Secretariat who spoke out against the US proposal on scientific grounds. The biological criteria for a ban were simply not met. Moreover, regulatory mechanisms for managing potential threats, such as negative effects of climate change, already exist in all range States and there are numerous national and international agreements for the conservation of the polar bear, making the existing harvest sustainable.

While a trade ban would have been a direct hit to Inuit subsistence-based livelihoods that depend upon access to sustainable polar bear trade from well-managed hunts, and thereby removed their incentives to continue managing this important resource as they have done for centuries, it would have done nothing to address climate change and the need for countries like the US to re-think its need for fossil fuels.

The lesson to be learnt for the US and others is that making misguided political decisions without enough scientific evidence would only undermine the credibility of CITES and the essential conservation decisions it delivers to help over 30,000 species of animals and plants around the world.



## **FACE: FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR HUNTING AND CONSERVATION OF THE EU**

Established in 1977, FACE represents the interests of Europe's **7 million hunters** as an international non-profit-making nongovernmental organisation (NGO).

FACE is made up of its **Members: national hunters' associations** from **36 European countries** including the EU-27. This makes FACE the largest democratically representative body for hunters in the world. FACE also has 4 Associate Members and has its Secretariat in Brussels.

FACE upholds the **principle of sustainable use**, has been a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1987. [www.face.eu](http://www.face.eu)

### **FACE & CITES**

CITES is mainly relevant to hunters in relation to the import/export of hunting trophies, but also as one of a number of key international agreements setting the global conservation agenda, establishing conservation principles and providing the tools and means for cooperation. CITES currently has 178 Parties, including the 27 EU Member States which during CoP16, are expected to speak with one voice and to vote as a block.

NGOs such as FACE and other conservation organisations provide technical and scientific insights, and are able to participate and speak at the CoP. FACE is a long-standing participant in previous CoPs bringing to the table both its policy expertise, and the evidence-based conservation expertise of its Members and Partners. FACE works on CITES in partnership with Safari Club International (SCI) and the International Council for Game & Wildlife Conservation (CIC).

Please see our [Conservation Guide for CITES COP 16: FACE's Analysis of Selected Species Proposals](#) which deals with 4 species where we have expertise to share.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

**In Bangkok:** Johan Svalby - [johan.svalby@face.eu](mailto:johan.svalby@face.eu)

**In Brussels:** Marilise Saghbini - [marilise.saghbini@face.eu](mailto:marilise.saghbini@face.eu)

