

**Report of the Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Russian-American Commission on Polar Bears**  
**27-28 July 2018**  
**Egvekinot, Russian Federation**

The tenth meeting of the Russian-American Commission on Polar Bears (henceforth “Commission”) took place on July 27-28, 2018 in Egvekinot, Chukotka Autonomous Region, Russian Federation. Four commissioners were present at the meeting (Amirkhan Amirkhanov, Sergey Kavry, Greg Siekaniec, and Charles Brower), together with their delegations (Appendix 1). The Commission is responsible for implementing the bilateral Agreement on the Conservation and Management of the Alaska-Chukotka Population of Polar Bears (henceforth “Agreement”).

Friday, July 27, 2018

**Commissioner Amirkhanov** opened the meeting by welcoming the Russian and American participants. Amirkhanov expressed his hope for continued fruitful and constructive collaboration, which has for many years been the foundation of an open and honest relationship, close and active collaboration in a variety of areas, including at the level of the indigenous people of our countries. Amirkhanov noted the productive work of the Scientific Working Group (SWG).

**Commissioner Kavry** welcomed all those present and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to conduct this meeting in the region. He noted the increase in quality of the traditional indigenous knowledge and activities of the organization “Umka Patrol.”

**Commissioner Siekaniec** thanked his fellow Commissioners, Sergey Kavry and Amirkhan Amirkhanov, for hosting this 10th Meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Bilateral Commission and extended his thanks, on behalf of the U.S. delegation, to the local hosts, the Chukotka Autonomous Region. He recognized the importance of holding the meeting in Egvekinot, Chukotka, Russia showing support for subsistence hunters and communities interested in the conservation of polar bears. Commissioner Siekaniec acknowledged that over the past two years, there have been many actions taken that hold promise for long-term polar bear conservation and management. This information includes a new population estimate for the Alaska-Chukotka population of polar bears, a harvest risk assessment model that provides us with a more thorough and transparent process for assessing a sustainable taking limit, information on the eastern boundary for the Alaska-Chukotka population of polar bears, and information from the United States and Russia’s collaborative work on Wrangel Island. Commissioner Siekaniec acknowledged the work of the newly formed Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council (“ANCC”) to effectively represent Alaska Natives in polar bear management and subsistence harvest decisions. Finally, he noted that at the 2016 Commission meeting in Anchorage, Alaska a presentation was made on a management plan for a legal subsistence harvest of polar bears in Chukotka and stated that he looked forward to hearing about progress towards implementation of this plan in the Chukotka Autonomous Region and other efforts being conducted in the Russian Federation to study and manage this shared population of polar bears.

**Commissioner Brower** thanked our Russian colleagues for hosting this meeting in Egvekinot, Chukotka, Russia. He emphasized the importance of meeting in polar bear hunting communities and his hope that we were one step closer to authorizing subsistence harvest of polar bears for the Native peoples of Chukotka. Commissioner Brower emphasized the importance of the new polar bear co-management organization, the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council and their representation of the 15 polar bear hunting communities in Alaska. Commissioner Brower also commented on the importance of reliable and current information to inform decisions the Commissioners will make at this meeting, including the need to address the location of the eastern boundary of the Agreement area. Commissioner Brower supported the recent efforts to more effectively include Traditional Ecological Knowledge (“TEK”) into decisions before the Scientific Working Group, and he would like for the expansion of this effort to be made a priority, as well as the completion of a subsistence needs assessment for Alaska communities. Both TEK and the subsistence needs assessment are crucial components of the decision-making process that must be adequately considered moving forward.

**Agenda item: Introduction of Delegates and Observers**

A list of participants is included in Appendix 1.

**Agenda item: Commissioners Approve Agenda**

The agenda was approved and included in Appendix 2.

**Agenda item: Briefings from Scientific Working Group (SWG) Co-Chairs on the Results of the SWG meeting and Recommendations to the Commissioners**

Drs. Stanislav Belikov and Eric Regehr welcomed those present and provided a report of the scientific presentations and discussions at the meeting of the SWG.

**SWG objectives:**

- An assessment of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population, considering changes in habitat and climate conditions.
- An analysis of the eastern boundary of the population extending north from Point Barrow.
- An analysis of the changes in population parameters.
- An assessment of the level of risk associated with different harvest levels.

During the SWG meeting, presentations were made on the results of scientific research that allowed for estimation of population abundance and risk levels from harvest. A decision was made to develop a strategy for the use of traditional ecological knowledge and to conduct a seminar with participation from representatives of indigenous people with the goal of active participation in management of the population. The most important discussion was on possible harvest levels and risk assessment.

Dr. Regehr presented the following recommendations from the SWG:

**Recommendation No. 1: New biological information on the eastern boundary of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population**

The SWG recognized the importance of understanding the location of the biological boundaries of the AC population to ensure that research and management activities are applied to the appropriate biological unit.

Recent location data for polar bears obtained from satellite telemetry provided the opportunity to reassess the eastern, but not the western, biological boundary of the AC population. In accordance with a 2016 request of the Commissioners, an analysis of these data was performed that indicated that the eastern biological boundary likely occurs within the region between Icy Cape and the western end of Smith Bay in Alaska.

New information on the biological boundary is presented as a region, rather than as a single line, because there is uncertainty in the biological data, and because polar bear populations exhibit mixing across boundaries.

The SWG recognizes that biological boundaries may change in the future as polar bear habitat continues to change.

New information on the eastern biological boundary is not yet published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal but has undergone peer review by subject matter experts.

**Recommendation No. 2: Assessment of sustainable harvest level based on new biological information**

The SWG recognized that new biological information is available on the abundance and status of polar bears in the Chukchi Sea, based on scientific data and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. This information is not yet published in peer-reviewed scientific journals but has undergone peer review by subject matter experts. This information, as well as other published data sources on the ecology and health of Chukchi Sea polar bears, was incorporated into an analysis and report entitled "Harvest Risk Assessment for Polar Bears in the Chukchi Sea: Report to the Commissioners of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Agreement" that was completed in June 2018. This report evaluated the biological risks associated with a range of harvest strategies. Multiple SWG members participated in developing and

reviewing this report, but it has not undergone peer review by subject matter experts and is not yet published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

The harvest risk assessment report indicated that, currently, a sustainable harvest level (SHL) of 80-90 bears/year — of which no more than 1/3 are female — represents a moderate degree of risk of reducing the population below maximum net productivity level (the population size that produces maximum sustainable yield) and is unlikely to have significant negative population effects. Harvest levels of approximately 50 and 120 bears/year were identified as relatively low and high risk, respectively. The report identified a range of potential harvest levels, rather than a specific number, because there is uncertainty in the biological data and the future effects on polar bears of changes and variability in sea ice and other aspects of polar bear habitat, and because determination of SHL also depends on the Commissioners' risk tolerance relative to the biological effects of harvest, meeting subsistence needs, and other factors.

These results apply to the area within the Chukchi Sea (CS) subpopulation boundary as identified by the Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. This area extends from approximately Chaunskaya Bay in Russia to Icy Cape in the U.S. This area is smaller than, and encompassed by, the area of the AC population under the Agreement. The harvest risk assessment focused on the CS subpopulation boundary because it is the area for which new biological information was available.

It is critically important to keep in mind that these results require that harvest adheres to a functional management system in the U.S. and Russia. This means that the reporting of human-caused removals is timely and accurate. These results also require a coupled research-management framework incorporating new biological information obtained from scientific studies and TEK, which appropriately updates the SHL no less than once every 10 years.

The SWG also discussed the challenges of determining SHL for the larger area to which the Agreement applies, as summarized in the main body of this report. The SWG recognized that if the SHL determined for the CS subpopulation were applied to the area to which the Agreement applies, the biological risks associated with that level of harvest would be reduced. The SWG recognized that additional research, especially in Russian territory, is necessary to provide an accurate assessment of SHL in the area to which the Agreement applies.

### **Recommendation No. 3: Proposed changes to membership of the SWG**

The SWG proposed the following changes to the membership of the group:

- a. Ryan Wilson (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to replace Eric Regehr (University of Washington) as the American co-chair of the group.
- b. Eric Regehr (University of Washington) to replace Ryan Wilson (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) as a member of the group.

Mr. Siekaniec thanked the co-chairs of the SWG for their productive work and explained the change of the co-chairman from the American side, noting that it is due to Dr. Regehr's change in employer, which does not provide the necessary support for him to continue in the role as co-chair.

Mr. Amirkhanov noted that when the previous quota was adopted, there were no such detailed studies, so there are solid grounds today to discuss this topic with more certainty.

### **Agenda item: Russia presentation on implementation of the Agreement**

(Amirkhan Amirkhanov, Irina Fominykh, Olga Safonova)

Mr. Amirkhanov made a report on the implementation of the Agreement in Russia, as well as on the legislative regulation of its conservation in the Russian Federation in conditions of climate change, anthropogenic impact, conflict cases and poaching.

He also noted that the Russian side highly appreciates the Russian-American cooperation in this field and the commitment to its continuation, especially in the area of scientific research.

The work accomplished by the SWG was considered highly important in terms of making decisions on changing quotas and regarding the activities to lift the moratorium on the polar bears harvest by the indigenous population.

Irina Fominykh informed about the changes in the leadership of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation. She noted that cooperation priorities in the Arctic, as well as work with the indigenous population, were identified among the priorities of the work.

It was also noted, in particular, that the Russian side considers it inadvisable to make changes in the Russian-American Agreement, due to possible difficulties in the work. The Russian side has expressed its commitment to address current issues within the Commission without revising the Agreement. The Russian side is ready to support the initiative of the American side to change the biological boundary on the eastern (American) side of the population.

Olga Safonova reported on the legislative regulation of indigenous peoples' interests in the Chukotka Autonomous Region and on the active work carried out by the Administration of the Chukotka Autonomous Region. The administration of the Chukotka Autonomous Region, together with representatives of the indigenous population, public organizations and academia, developed a plan for the conservation and use of the Chukchi-Alaskan polar bear population in the Chukotka Autonomous Region.

**Agenda Item: U.S. presentation on implementation of Agreement**  
(Mary Colligan)

Mary Colligan presented a report on the implementation of the Agreement within the United States.

It was noted that the American side continues to be actively involved in implementing article 10 of the Agreement, in particular, implementation of a regulatory program for the conservation of polar bears and their habitat in Alaska, monitoring of the harvest of polar bears, collecting scientific data and information on the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population, and steps taken to involve native people in the implementation and enforcement of the Agreement. She highlighted the recent formation of the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council to represent villages in the State of Alaska that engage in the subsistence harvest of polar bears. Next steps identified included continuing negotiations between the ANCC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine respective roles and responsibilities in the co-management of subsistence harvest of Chukchi Sea polar bears, joint meetings with local hunters and village representatives, and work to increase timeliness, accuracy and completeness of subsistence harvest reporting.

**Agenda Item: Historic overview of harvest in Alaska in 1989-2017**  
(James Wilder)

Presented on polar bear harvest data (1989-2017) for the AC population on the US side. Average harvest since 2011 for the AC population was 39 bears/year (this includes half of harvest in Utqiagvik, Alaska) and for the CS subpopulation was 25 bears/year. Findings and recommendations were presented that suggest methods for improving harvest reporting in the US.

**Agenda item: Collaborative studies on Wrangel Island**  
(Eric Regehr, Stanislav Belikov)

Reported on collaborative field studies on Wrangel Island in the summer and autumn of 2016 and 2017. Study methods included ground-based visual surveys and non-invasive genetic sampling via hair collection were conducted. In 2017, 589 bears were observed on Wrangel, the largest number to date. This project was identified as important to long-term research and monitoring. Results affirm the critical importance of Wrangel to CS bears.

**Agenda item: Pilot TEK study in U.S. Chukchi villages (NSB)**

(Andrew Von Duyke)

Discussed a new polar bear TEK pilot study (Braund et al. 2018) focused on informing the integrated population model used to estimate demographic parameters for CS polar bears and the harvest risk assessment for CS polar bears. General concurrence between TEK and scientific information was identified regarding that status and health of polar bear in the Chukchi Sea. A project update was provided on the ongoing non-invasive genetic sampling work being conducted by the North Slope Borough.

**Agenda item: Chukchi-Alaska polar bear population demographic parameter estimation**

(Eric Regehr)

Eric Regehr reported on activities aimed at studying the Chukchi-Alaska polar bear population.

Integrated modeling was used (using complex information from various sources, including the installation of satellite tags). An evaluation of the survival of individuals with a ranking by sex and age was also performed. A number of reproductive indicators have been evaluated. Approximate density of the population and its sizes are calculated.

The size of the population is estimated in the range of 1552 - 5944 individuals (average figure 2937).

An extrapolated estimate was made for the entire area of the Agreement on polar bears, which gives the numbers in 2283-9527 individuals (the average figure is 4437). At the same time, there is an understanding that this extrapolation incorporates significant uncertainty.

**Agenda item: Updated biological boundary analysis for the Chukchi Sea and Southern Beaufort Sea sub-populations**

(James Wilder)

Results from an extensive analysis of satellite telemetry data for polar bears in the CS and Southern Beaufort Sea regions were presented (Scharf et al. in review). The analysis developed a Bayesian estimation method for population delineation that has advantages compared to previous methods. Findings suggest that the eastern biological boundary of the AC population is located between Icy Cape and the west of Smith Bay, Alaska.

**Agenda item: Polar bear harvest risk assessment**

(Eric Regehr)

Presented results from an integrated population model (IPM) in a Bayesian framework that model and analyzed capture-recapture, radiotelemetry, and count data collected 2008–2016 in American territory. Benefits of this modeling approach include mitigating bias, increased precision, and the ability to incorporate auxiliary information through the use of informative priors based on other scientific case studies and TEK (Braund et al. 2018). Estimated abundance was 2,937 (95% CI = 1,552-5,944) for the area within the CS subpopulation as defined by the Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG), and estimated reproductive rates were average-to-high for the species. A harvest risk assessment report (Regehr et al. 2018) was completed based on results from Regehr et al. (in review) and other sources and evaluated a wide range of potential harvest strategies. Results suggested that a sustainable harvest level (SHL) with current harvest of 80-90 bears/year likely presents a moderate risk of decreasing abundance below maximum net productivity level (MNPL). Sensitivity of SHL to future environmental conditions (e.g., declining carrying capacity) and management conditions (e.g., precision of population data) were presented. Key assumptions of the harvest risk assessment included the use of a state-dependent management framework and existence of a functional management system.

Saturday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018

**Agenda item: Meeting opening, brief review of discussion from previous day**  
(Commissioners)

Commissioners A.Amirkhanov and G.Siekaniec opened the session and corrected the agenda.

**Agenda item: Range States Initiative on trade/wildlife enforcement network**  
(James Wilder)

J.Wilder presented information on the progress made since 2013, when the polar bear range states agreed to explore mechanisms to counter the threat of poaching and illegal trade in polar bears and polar bear parts, including enhanced cooperation among law enforcement agencies at the national, regional and global levels; and to strengthen international cooperation to improve the clarity of legal trade data through the adoption of more effective reporting and monitoring practices. James noted that the countries organizing the Wildlife Crime Working Group Meeting in London, October 8-12, 2018 extend their welcome and invitation to Russia to attend this important meeting and request a Russian law enforcement point of contact to whom they may extend a formal invitation. The response can be sent to [bryan\\_landry@fws.gov](mailto:bryan_landry@fws.gov), Senior Special Agent, US Fish & Wildlife Service, International Operations Unit.

**Agenda item: Russian presentations**  
(Stanislav Belikov, Vladimir Chernook)

S.Belikov and V.Chernook provided information on the results of work carried out in 2016.

As part of the aerial survey for seal capturing, information on the polar bear population was collected. 3 flights were conducted. An estimate of the polar bear population was made for the first time, its index is estimated at no less than 3000 individuals.

**Agenda item: Presentations by observers**

Katya Wassillie made a statement on behalf of the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council (ANCC), representing the voice of Alaska Native Communities that harvest polar bears for subsistence. We have much at stake in the decisions to be made here, and appreciate the commitments we have heard to officially change the eastern boundary of the area to which the Agreement applies from Point Barrow to Icy Cape. We request that this change be finalized before the next Commission meeting in 2019. We request that that Commission adopt the highest sustainable harvest level and annual taking limit possible for many reasons including concerns among our people about the implementation of a quota and the potential negative impacts of changing our hunting from a relaxed, healthy, and natural co-existence with the resource to an atmosphere of anxiety and tension. Lastly, it is essential to the legitimacy of this process that our concerns are taken into consideration and that we are able to affect change in this process through our participation.

Nicole Kanayurak with the North Slope Borough, Alaska, United States. Thank you to the hosts for good hospitality. We strongly urge the Commission to endorse the Stephen Braund Traditional Ecological Knowledge study and encourage expanding this research and the utilization of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. We appreciate the Commission in recognizing the importance of the polar bear to Indigenous culture and food security. We commend the Scientific Working Group for achieving the tasks on the boundary analysis and sustainable harvest range. We support a boundary change based on the new scientific analysis on the subpopulation range. Doing this will have positive impacts to sustainable management because of the clarity and consistency of boundaries. Indigenous People believe in a sustainable harvest level. We have the upmost respect for the polar bear and want to be law abiding citizens. A take limit is not just an abstract math analysis, it is the ability to have food for our souls and a close relationship with the polar bear as expressed in our art, dance and values. Because of this, it needs to be at the higher end of the range. Going for the lower end of the range may not be a lower risk if it makes it more difficult to cooperate. Climate change is already incorporated in

this range as well. Right now there is no immediate conservation concern and exercising our subsistence right as Indigenous Peoples is not a threat to the polar bear. We encourage and support a higher sustainable level because any risk is a risk to the Indigenous People and bear holistically. Thank you.

Victoria Golbtseva, representative of the regional public organization "Native Word", made a presentation of Vladilen Kavry's book "The Polar Bear Nature".

Elizabeth Kruger, World Wildlife Fund, noted that the the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) commented on the importance of adaptive management which is one of the most important components of successfully managing the Alaska-Chukotka subpopulation. They strongly encourage the Commissioners to ensure that the management activities apply only to communities within the bounds of the Chukchi Sea Subpopulation, as described by the Polar Bear Specialist Group. Placing this eastern boundary at Icy Cape is consistent with management needs and is supported by biological evidence. WWF also does not oppose managed subsistence hunting of polar bears in Alaska or aboriginal harvest of polar bears in Chukotka and acknowledged that polar bear harvest has always occurred and should be allowed to continue at sustainable levels. The best and only realistic way to end illegal hunting in Russia is to open the harvest and intensively document all takes. WWF also requested that the Russian Federation provide a list of precise requirements to be met in order to authorize a legal subsistence harvest, rather than demanding fulfilment of vague principles.

Nikita Platonov, Severtsov Institute for Evolutionary Problems, RAS, warned the Commission against the decision to adopt the maximum quota of polar bear harvest, based on high risks for the population.

#### **Agenda item: Review and discussion of pending decisions**

##### **New Biological Information on the Eastern Boundary of the Alaska-Chukotka Polar Bear Population**

The Commissioners reviewed the recommendation of the Scientific Working Group regarding new information on the eastern boundary of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population. Commissioner Siekaniec expressed appreciation for the work of the Scientific Working Group to examine available biological information to inform the eastern boundary of the Alaska-Chukotka subpopulation. He recognized that the analysis indicates that the biological boundary is within the range from Icy Cape to Smith Bay. In considering this scientific information and the desire to avoid overlap in the management area of the Inuvialuit-Inupiat Agreement and the position of the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council (ANCC), Commissioner Siekaniec proposed that the Parties pursue the exchange of diplomatic notes to modify the area to which the Agreement applies pursuant to Article 3, and that the process be initiated as quickly as possible and completed prior to the next Commission meeting.

##### **Harvest Risk Analysis and Sustainable Harvest Level**

Commissioner Siekaniec noted that the harvest risk analysis examines two management objectives, three alternative assumptions about carrying capacity, two vital rates and three degrees of risk tolerance. He noted that the Commission has not yet agreed on a management objective, but is considering a sustainable harvest level that is consistent with both management objective interpretations put forward by the Scientific Working Group. Commissioner Siekaniec stated that the United States intends to have further discussions to help inform selection of a management objective that is consistent with the definition of sustainable harvest level in the Agreement. He noted his appreciation for the significant work conducted by the Scientific Working Group in providing abundance estimates and sustainable harvest level options. He further stated that when considering sustainable harvest levels, it is important to consider our collective commitment to update the population status at least as frequently as on a ten-year interval, implement a functional harvest management system in both Russia and the United States and obtain accurate and complete harvest

data. He noted that the Commissioners had also discussed the appropriate eastern biological boundary of the population. Given all of the above, Commissioner Siekaniec proposed that the Commissioners adopt an annual quota of 85 polar bears, no more than one-third of which are female. He noted that the annual sustainable harvest level will be considered at the next Commission meeting in light of any new information available at that time.

**Agenda item: Vote by Commissioners**

**Area to which the Agreement Applies**

Commissioners voted unanimously to accept the recommendation to pursue the exchange of diplomatic notes to modify the area to which the Agreement applies pursuant to Article 3, and that the process be initiated as quickly as possible and completed prior to the next Commission meeting.

**Sustainable Harvest Level**

Commissioners voted unanimously to adopt an annual quota of 85 polar bears, no more than one-third of which are female. They noted that the annual sustainable harvest level will be considered at the next Commission meeting in light of any new information available at that time.

**SWG Membership**

The Commissioners approved the following proposed changes to the membership of the Scientific Working Group: Ryan Wilson (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to replace Eric Regehr (University of Washington) as the American Co-Chair and Eric Regehr to replace Ryan Wilson as a member of the group.

**Agenda item: Discussion of the next steps for continuation of research, conservation, and management of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population**

Commissioner Siekaniec provided suggestions on behalf of the American Commissioners. He recognized the importance of an adaptive management approach to ensure that subsistence harvest levels of polar bears in the Alaska-Chukotka population are sustainable. This requires effective research and monitoring, based on scientific studies and Traditional Ecology Knowledge, and the ability to use the resulting biological information to adjust the sustainable harvest level as necessary to account for climate change and other factors. He commended the Scientific Working Group for their work in the past year, and expressed support for the following activities of the Scientific Working Group and invited specialists. First, updating the 3-year joint research plan identifying information needs and prioritizing future studies, with special attention paid to the importance of additional research in the western portion of the area to which the agreement applies. Second, the continued development of methods to integrate biological data from scientific studies and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Third, a detailed assessment of future methods to monitor population status and trend for the purpose of informing harvest management, which based on the information we heard today, should include consideration of the aerial survey methods. Finally, a continuation of collaborative research for polar bears on Wrangel Island is important for providing information on the western portion of the area to which the agreement applies.

Finally recognizing the importance of continued communication and information exchange within and across national borders, he expressed support for the following activities of the Scientific Working Group and invited specialists. First the sharing of documents and data related to human-polar bear conflicts and harvest management, including translation of important documents as necessary. And second, holding a workshop to share and develop consistent methods for harvest monitoring, harvest sampling, and collection of Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

**Agenda item: Organizational issues, including discussion of the next Commission meeting (location and dates)**

Commissioner Siekaniec said that the 2019 Commission meeting would be held in July or August in a community represented by the ANCC, in the spirit of the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting held in Egvekinot.

**Agenda item: Closing of the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission**

**Joint Statement by Commissioner Kavry and Commissioner Brower**

We, the indigenous Commissioners, appreciate the opportunity to communicate, share, and reflect on our common values, concerns, and ways of approaching management. It is with a shared mindset that we take this opportunity to make a joint statement on issues under consideration that are of the highest importance to us and our people.

On behalf of the Native people of Chukotka, we express our great appreciation for the work of the scientific working group on conducting research on the assessment of the condition and abundance of the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population. The Russian-American commission on polar bears has highly appreciated the great effort in scientific research and Traditional Ecological Knowledge in producing new current data about the condition of the population. The report of the Scientific Working Group showed that the condition of the population is good and provided a new estimate of population abundance at around 3,000 individuals.

We do not see any further reasons to put off the giving of the right to harvest polar bears to indigenous people. Implementing traditional harvest for indigenous people of Chukotka and Alaska is important for food, culture, tradition, and ceremonies. We are stating that everything should be done in order to open the harvest of polar bear in Chukotka.

In closing, again, we appreciate the excellent research that has taken place in preparation for this meeting and urge the continuation of this and especially the expansion of the use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in this process. We also urge the meaningful and consistent inclusion of indigenous people in scientific research. We acknowledge the importance of our ability to join our voices in this way to support each other and the importance of continuing communication and exchange of information into the future.

**Commissioners from the Russian Federation**

Amirkhan Amirkhanov

Sergey Kavry

**Commissioners from the USA**

Gregory Siekaniec

Charles Brower

Date: July 29<sup>th</sup> 2018