

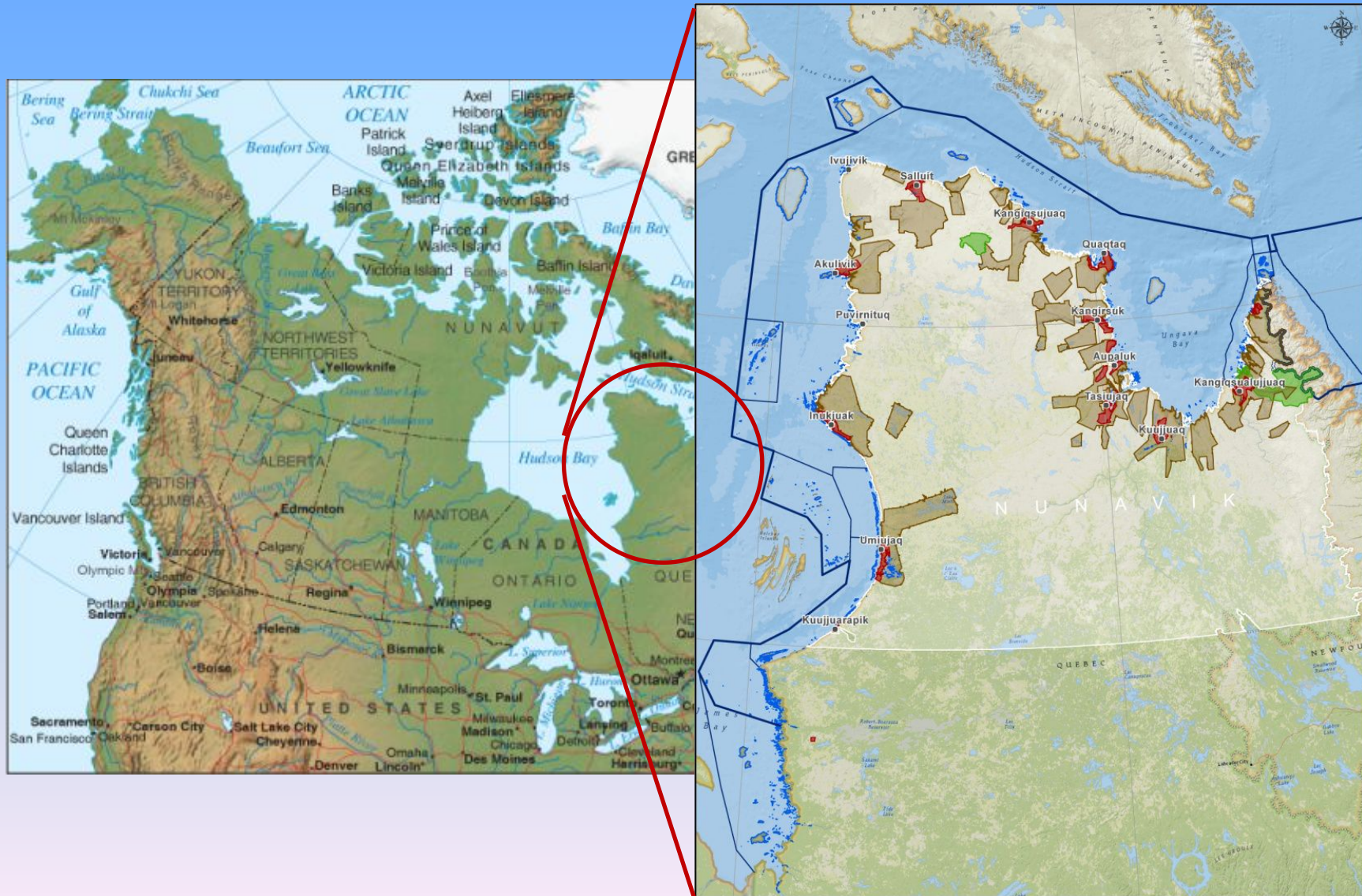
Nunavimmiut Perspectives on Polar Bears in Times of Change

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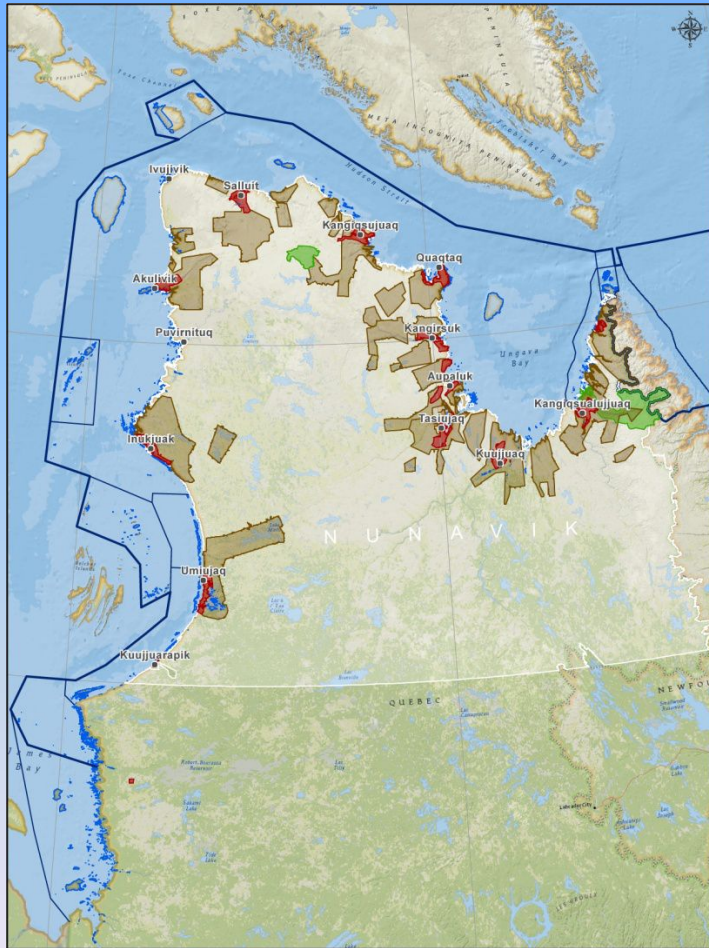
Arctic Biodiversity Congress
Trondheim, Norway
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A Profile of Nunavik



A Profile of Nunavik



- Nunavik is the region of Northern Québec north of 55°
- Includes terrestrial (443 000 km²) and marine (265 000 km²) environments
- 14 communities
- 12 000 Inuit

A Profile of Nunavik

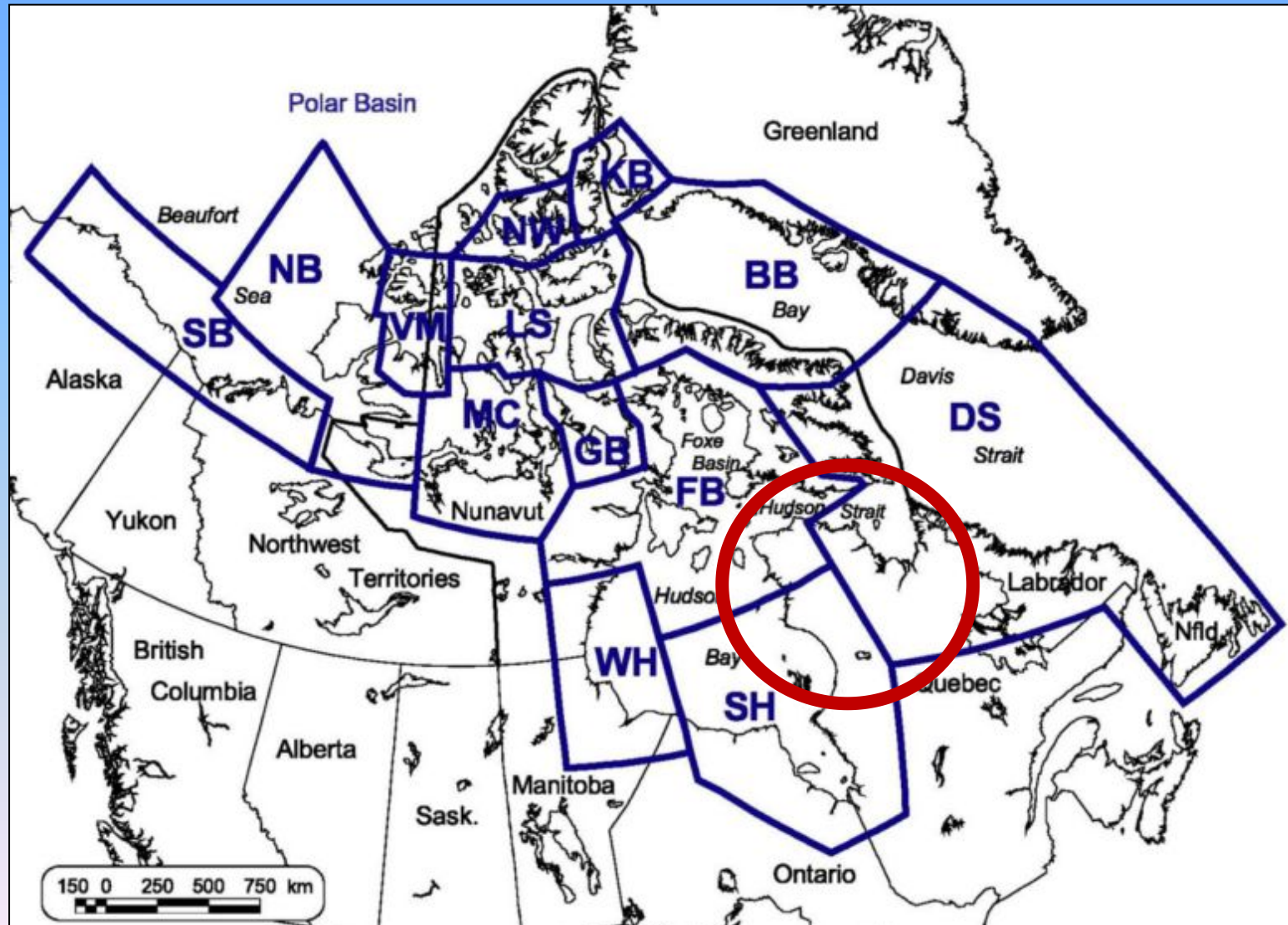
- Most Nunavimmiut continue to harvest wildlife as did their ancestors
- Harvesting local wildlife is an important source of nutrition
- Harvest can bring economic benefits to communities where there is little or no employment opportunities



Nunavimmiut and Polar Bears



Polar Bears in Nunavik



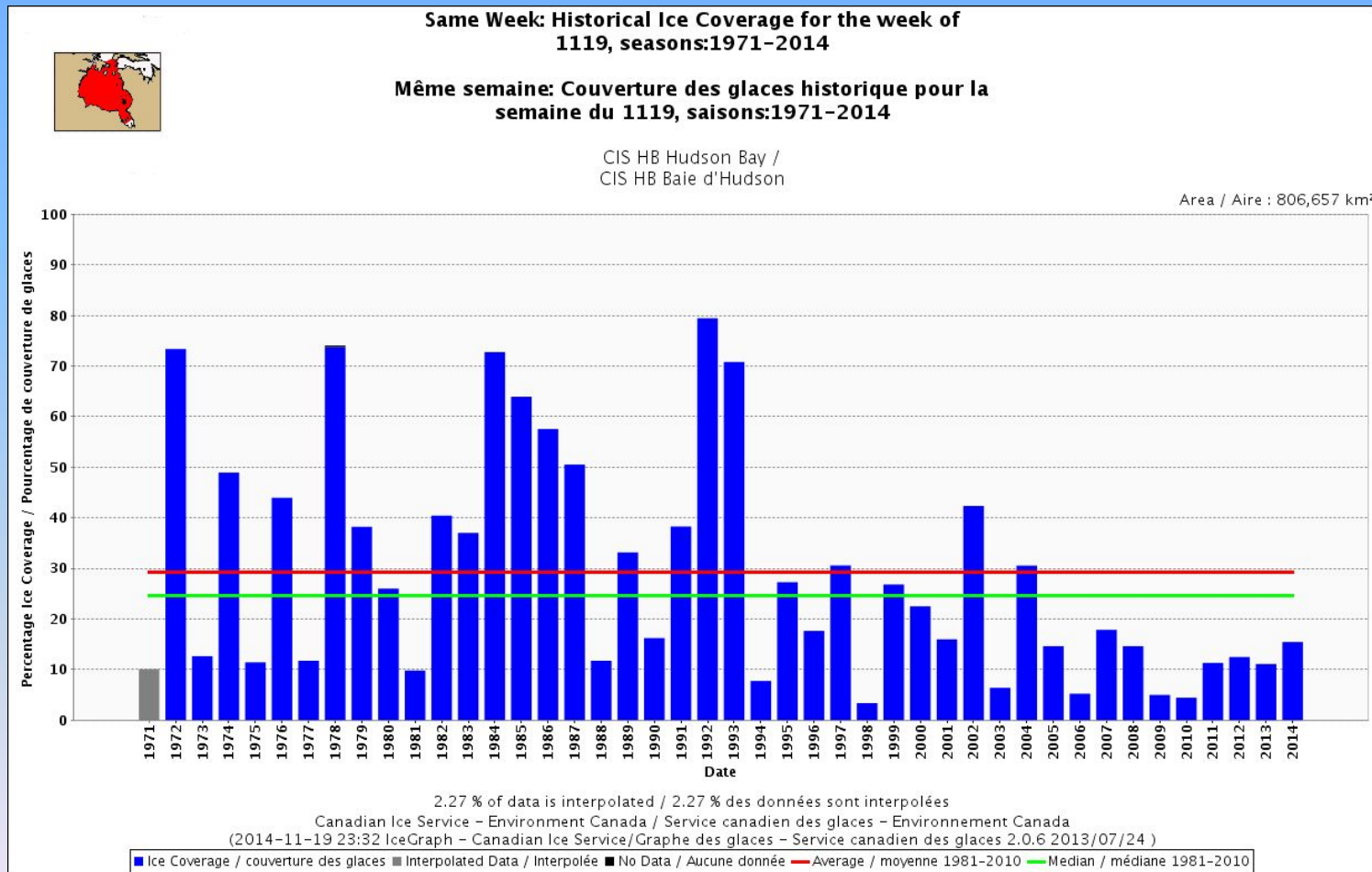
Polar Bears in Nunavik – Canadian PBTC Assessments

- South Hudson Bay
 - 951 (2011-2012)
 - Stable
- Foxe Basin
 - 2580 (2009-2010)
 - Stable
- Davis Strait
 - 2158 (2007)
 - Likely increase

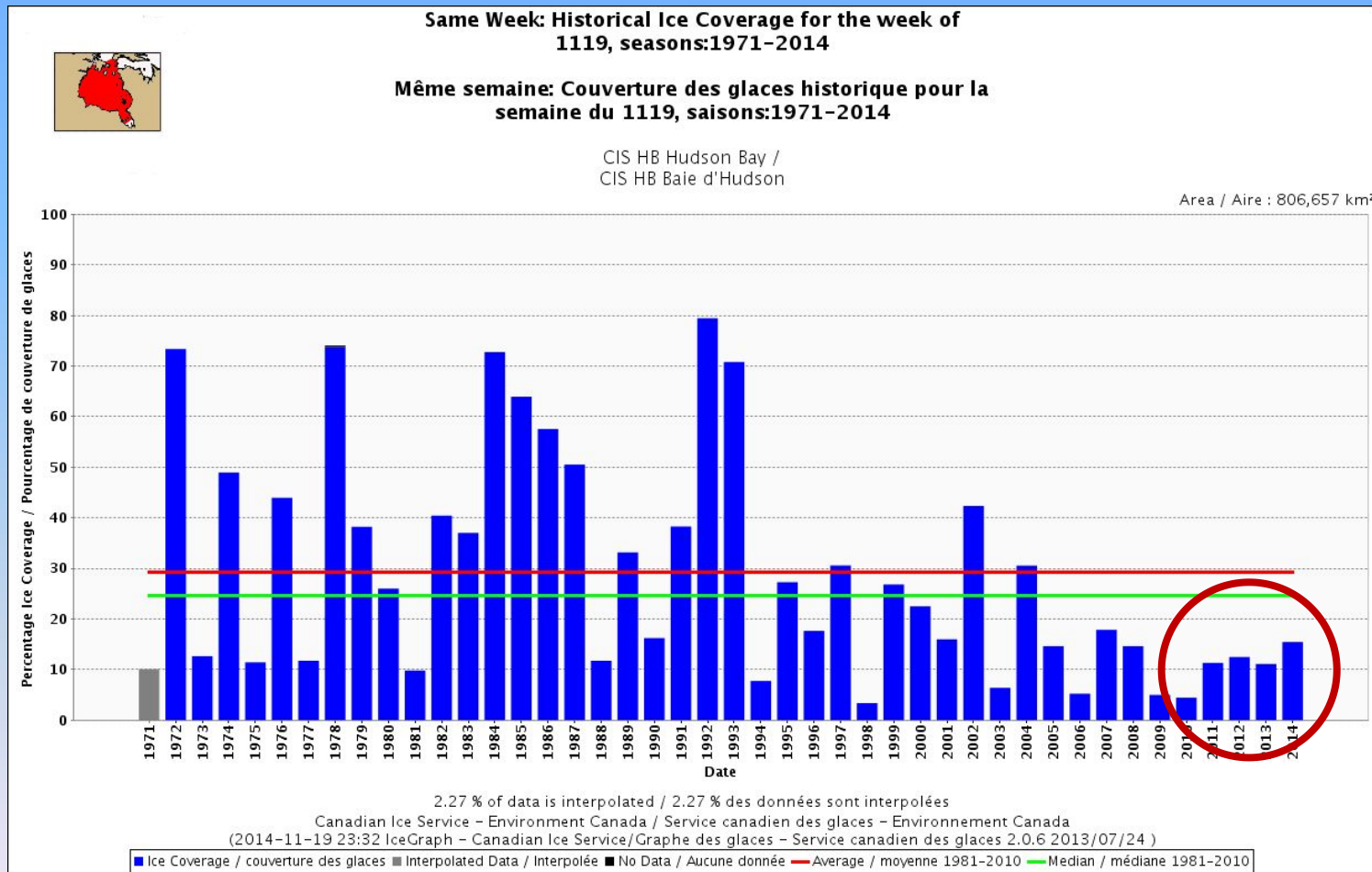
Polar Bears in Nunavik – Inuit Assessments

- South Hudson Bay
 - Increased
- Foxe Basin
 - Stable
- Davis Strait
 - Increased
- Inuit do not agree with management boundaries
 - Polar bears move freely through the management zones

Polar Bears in a Changing Environment



Polar Bears in a Changing Environment



Nunavimmiut Perspectives on Polar Bears

- Many polar bear biologists have reported evidence of declines in polar bear body condition
 - Inuit feel that scientists are not properly sampling bears
 - Wrong locations
 - Wrong times of the year



Nunavimmiut Perspectives on Polar Bears

- Inuit observe that polar bear body condition has remained stable
 - Always some variability
 - Some bears are fat, some bears are thin

Nunavimmiut Perspectives on Polar Bears

- Polar bear body condition related to other biological indicators
 - Reproductive success
 - Survival
- Nunavik Inuit have not observed decreases in litter size
 - Most females seen with cubs have 2 or sometimes 3 cubs
- Nunavimmiut have not seen decreases in age of bears that are harvested

Nunavimmiut Perspectives on Polar Bears

- Polar bear health (body condition) has not declined because polar bear health is not dependent on sea-ice
 - Some correlation but polar bears are opportunistic predators
 - Do not exclusively eat seals (ringed seals)
 - Eat beluga, narwhal, bowhead whales
 - Walrus
 - Arctic charr and other fish species
 - Ducks, seabirds and their eggs

Nunavimmiut Perspectives on Polar Bears

- Nunavimmiut feel there are more polar bears than ever
- More polar bears seen both on the ice, and close to communities
 - Polar bears are increasingly putting Inuit at risk
 - Polar bear attacks on Inuit are increasing
 - Polar bear destruction of property is increasing
- Scientists say this is the result of less ice and more bears coming onto the land
- Inuit observe that it is simply because there are more polar bears

Nunavimmiut Perspectives on Polar Bears – Eider Colonies



- Eider ducks are very important for some Inuit communities
 - Collect eider down and eggs
 - Harvest eiders for food
- Polar bears are increasingly destroying eider colonies
 - Negative impact on communities close to colonies

Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Nunavimmiut Perspectives

- Inuit have always regarded biodiversity as an integral part of their lives
 - Traditional activities and beliefs centre around animals and the world they inhabit
- Changes in biodiversity are noticed first by Inuit
 - New species arriving, especially birds and insects
 - Other species declining
 - Permafrost melting in some areas
 - Greater variability in weather patterns

Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Nunavimmiut Perspectives

- Most changes in Arctic biodiversity are ascribed to climate change
- Climate change does not affect all species equally
- We do not understand enough about the changing nature of species' inter-relationships or the relationships with their environment to make firm conclusions

Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Challenges with Polar Bear

- Inuit want to preserve Arctic biodiversity because their ways of life depend on it
- Inuit acknowledge climate change
- Inuit observe that polar bears have not responded negatively to climate change
 - This is in contradiction with the general impression of the state of polar bears by non-Arctic residents

Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Challenges with Polar Bear

- Why is the Inuit message not being heard?
 - Not easy to explain complex biological and environmental interactions in 5-minute news cycle
 - Inuit have not been given a prominent voice in the debate
 - Little mainstream recognition that sustainable use of wildlife resources is an important conservation tool

Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Challenges with Polar Bear

- Polar bear might be a good tool for fundraising for environmental campaigns
- Do not adequately represent current state of Arctic biodiversity nor future challenges
- Canadian polar bear sub-populations are doing well
 - Due to, in large part, the efforts of Inuit
 - Sound Canadian polar bear management regime

Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Challenges with Polar Bear

- Continued use of polar bear as an icon to mainstream Arctic biodiversity risks losing the engagement of Nunavimmiut and other Canadian Inuit
 - Erosion of Inuit trust in science and the way science is used
 - Long-term consequences for collaborations between Inuit and scientists
 - Ultimately does not benefit polar bears or Inuit

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Thank You
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