

**IUCN/Species Survival Commission
Polar Bear Specialist Group**



Heads of Delegations

Polar Bear Range States

Parties to the 1973 Agreement on the conservation of polar bears

Tromsø, Norway, August 19, 2014

Inquiry re: funding of an increased capacity of the PBSG

The IUCN/Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) met in June in Fort Collins, USA, to discuss a range of matters important for the future functioning of the group. I sent an email to you all July 20 giving links to meeting overview and proceedings published on the PBSG website.

One of the main discussion topics during the meeting was how the PBSG will be able to increase its capacity to handle our increasing workload. During the last decade, and especially since the 2009 Range States meeting in Tromsø, requests for information from the PBSG have increased dramatically. This increase stems largely from our new role as independent scientific advisers to the Parties/Range States (RS), and from the burgeoning demand for unbiased information about the status of polar bears and their habitat from the public at large.

Although the PBSG had previously discussed this challenge, the situation is now critical. Unless we can significantly increase our operational capacity, within the next 2 years, we will be unable to meet our growing obligations.

During the June meeting, IUCN/Species Survival Commission Chair Simon Stuart suggested that we needed a dedicated IUCN/PBSG program officer, which is becoming the norm for other Specialist Groups (SG). Such a position would take pressure off of the Chair and the members (all of whom serve as volunteers on top of their full time obligations), and would facilitate meeting the increasing expectations of the PBSG.

This position would cost approximately USD 150,000 annually — including benefits, administrative expenses, salary, and some operational funding for travel. To attract highly skilled applicants we also need a degree of certainty, and therefore will seek funding for a minimum of a 4-year engagement, a period coinciding with a full IUCN quadrennium cycle.

We are prepared to seek sponsors on the open market to fund such a position, but wanted to discuss this first with the RS. Non-governmental funding is also common within IUCN and other Specialist Groups. Program Officers and even SG Chairs are routinely hosted by conservation organizations associated with specific species, though arrangement are formally made to maintain operational independence.

The PBSG is sensitive to the fact that funding sources may influence the perception of independence for any organization. Also, because this kind of support would improve our ability to provide timely advice to the RS, the RS would be major beneficiaries, and hence have an important stake in developing our capacity. We therefore decided to first inquire whether the RS would be willing to provide the initial funding for this position.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this proposal. Due to the urgency of the matter, and to the fact that finding sponsors on the open market could be a long and painstaking process, I allow myself to stress that we will need an answer as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dag Vongraven". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dag Vongraven
Chair, IUCN/Polar Bear Specialist Group

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