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## Nunavut has too many polar bears, Inuit say; Draft management plan contradicts scientists

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There are too many polar bears in parts of Nunavut and climate change hasn't yet affected any of them, says a draft management plan from the territorial government that contradicts much of conventional scientific thinking.

The proposed plan - which is to go to public hearings in Iqaluit on Tuesday - says growing bear numbers are increasingly jeopardizing public safety and it's time Inuit knowledge drove management policy.

"Inuit believe there are now so many bears that public safety has become a major concern," says the document, the result of four years of study and public consultation.

"Public safety concerns, combined with the effects of polar bears on other species, suggest that in many Nunavut communities, the polar bear may have exceeded the coexistence threshold." Polar bears killed two Inuit last summer.

The plan leans heavily on Inuit knowledge, which yields population estimates higher than those suggested by western science for almost all of the 13 included bear populations.

Scientists say only one population of bears is growing; Inuit say there are nine. Environment Canada says four populations are shrinking; Inuit say none are. The proposed plan downplays one of the scientific community's main concerns.

"Although there is growing scientific evidence linking the impacts of climate change to reduced body condition of bears and projections of population declines, no declines have currently been attributed to climate change," it says. "(Inuit knowledge) acknowledges that polar bears are exposed to the effects of climate change, but suggests that they are adaptable."

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