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Honourable Tracy Schmidt
Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures
344 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Subject: Request to Launch Feasibility Assessments for a National Marine Conservation Area in the Western Hudson Bay AND an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area in the Seal River Watershed

Dear Minister Schmidt,

We are writing to express our support for launching a feasibility assessment for two potential protected areas: 1) a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) in Western Hudson Bay and 2) an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) in the Seal River Watershed. Both could play a valuable role in protecting polar bears and addressing their greatest threat, climate change.

The Western Hudson Bay is home to one of the best known and most comprehensively studied populations of polar bears. Unfortunately, these bears are being heavily impacted by climate change with the most recent population survey, from 2021, estimating a 27% decline in just five years—a continuation of a long-term downward trend. With a business-as-usual approach to addressing climate change, these bears are expected to disappear by 2100.[1] Given these threats, we see great value in assessing the potential impacts of placing protections on some of the waters and lands that these bears depend on—protections that would also combat climate change by safeguarding these environments as critical areas of carbon sequestration.

[1] Molnár, P. K., Bitz, C. M., Holland, M. M., Kay, J. E., Penk, S. R., & Amstrup, S. C. (2020). Fasting season length sets temporal limits for Global Polar Bear Persistence. *Nature Climate Change, 10(8), 732–738*. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0818-9

We understand, and respect, that there are many factors to consider here—from economic and commercial factors to social and environmental factors. Performing a feasibility assessment for these two projects is far from an obligation to complete the projects.

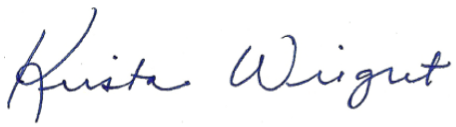
Rather, such an assessment would serve as an important management tool for making informed decisions about the future of these cherished ecosystems.

Beyond the impacts on polar bears, taking steps towards conserving these two areas would help Canada meet its commitment to protect 25% of the country's lands and waters by 2025.

We urge your government to rapidly launch the feasibility assessment phase for an NMCA in Western Hudson Bay and an IPCA in the Seal River Watershed. Polar bears face immense challenges in a warming world. Every piece of their habitat that we can better understand matters to their future—and to life across the Arctic.

Thank you for considering this important issue. We would be grateful for an opportunity to discuss these matters further and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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