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## SULLIVAN CONVENES POLAR BEAR SUMMIT TO RESOLVE CONCERNS OVER SUBSISTENCE QUOTA

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**WASHINGTON, DC** – Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) convened a summit between Alaskans from the North Slope and representatives with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the State Department regarding a dispute over the number of Chukchi Sea polar bears that may be harvested for subsistence purposes. The harvest of the bears is subject to a treaty between the U.S. and Russia.

“Alaskans on the North Slope are very concerned about the real threat of criminal penalties for doing what their communities have had to do for centuries – harvesting polar bears to feed and support their families,” **said Senator Sullivan**. “In trying to resolve their concerns, Alaskans have had to travel from one federal agency to the next, often getting conflicting stories and a frustrating runaround. That’s why convening this summit in one place, where interested parties could ask questions and receive commitments in the presence of the other stakeholders, was so important.”

Senator Lisa Murkowski joined Senator Sullivan at the summit in the Capitol on Thursday, June 9. Director of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Dan Ashe and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Fisheries David Balton attended the meeting, along with staff from each of their agencies. Representatives from the North Slope included Taqulik Hepa, director of the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management, John Hopson, Jr., acting president of the North Slope Borough Assembly and mayor of Wainwright, and Sayers Tuzroyluk, president of Voice of the Arctic Inupiat.

The treaty between the U.S. and Russia on the conservation of Chukchi Sea polar bears was agreed to in 2000. In 2007, Congress amended the Marine Mammal Protection Act to implement the agreement. In recent months, USFWS indicated it would be announcing penalties and enforcement measures for violations of the quota.

“Without Senator Sullivan’s engagement on this polar bear issue, we would not be where we are today,” said Taqulik Hepa, following the summit. “Thanks to his efforts, Alaska Natives from across the state will continue to engage in subsistence activities as they have since time immemorial without fear of federal interference or prosecution. This was a big win for food security and the North Slope Borough is deeply grateful for the efforts of Senator Sullivan and Senator Murkowski in advocating for our hunters.”

“I appreciate Director Ashe and Ambassador Balton for recognizing how important the polar bear harvest is to many Alaska communities, and the seriousness of the proposed penalties on Alaska Native hunters,” **Senator Sullivan added**. “Setting aside time to meet with the people whose lives are affected by these regulations is a good first step toward identifying a workable way forward. I also appreciate Taqulik, John, Sayers, and the other North Slope representatives for their patience, willingness to travel great lengths to meet with these federal officials, and determination in representing the interests of Alaskans.”