



## The Global Warming Policy Foundation

55 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL  
0207 340 6038 [www.thegwpf.org](http://www.thegwpf.org)

BBC Complaints  
PO Box 1922  
Darlington  
DL3 0UR

2 December 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

### Seven Worlds, One Planet - BBC One, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019

In last night's wildlife TV series Seven Worlds, One Planet Sir David Attenborough and the BBC misled the public in a most egregious way. In the programme, Sir David made false claims, used emotionally manipulative language and misrepresented several natural biological processes and habitat conditions as the effects of human-caused climate change.

In the episode on North America which aired last night, Attenborough states:

*"But it is in the far north of the continent that human beings are affecting wildlife most critically. Canada is warming faster than any other country on Earth. Polar bears have always relied on sea ice for their hunting. But summers are now getting longer and hotter. For most polar bears this is a time of starvation. On the shores of Hudson Bay some polar bear are finding a new source of food....The tides comes in, bringing with it other Northern giants - beluga whales... This extraordinary behaviour has only been reported here in this remote corner of North America, and only in the last few years. This one small group of bears has found an ingenious way of surviving the lean summer months. But for others it is no so easy..."*

1. Contrary to Attenborough's claim, summers are not a time of starvation for polar bears. Biologists refer to the time that bears spend ashore in summer with little or no food available as 'fasting'. Describing naturally fasting bears as starving animals is an appeal to emotions meant to make people uncomfortable and does not properly describe the natural biological process.

Director: Dr Benny Peiser

Board of Trustees: Dr Jerome Booth, Dr Chris Gibson-Smith, Kathy Gyngell, Prof Michael Kelly FRS FREng, Dr Ruth Lea CBE, Lord Lilley, Terence Mordaunt, Charles Moore, Baroness Nicholson, Graham Stringer MP, Lord Turnbull  
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Fasting during the summer when food is difficult or impossible to obtain is an evolutionary strategy unique to polar bears: it is what allows them to thrive in one of the harshest habitats on the planet.

2. Contrary to Attenborough's claim, the polar bears shown hunting beluga whales were fat and healthy, not starving. Polar bears consume roughly two-thirds of their yearly calorie intake during the spring and the excess energy is stored as fat. This fat is a hedge against times when little or no food is available. All North American bear species store fat for this reason but only the polar bear faces food shortages in summer and winter. This is why virtually all polar bears are heaviest at the start of summer while black and brown bears (aka grizzlies) are heaviest at the start of winter.

3. Contrary to Attenborough's claim, the behaviour shown of polar bears hunting belugas from shore in summer is not extraordinary, is not confined to this area of the Canadian Arctic and has not 'only been reported in the last few years.' A peer-reviewed scientific paper by Tom Smith and Becky Sjare in the journal *Arctic* (1990) describes similar hunting strategies by polar bears close to the shore of Somerset Island in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago in the 1980s, where thousands of beluga females come to give birth and nurse their newborn calves. Rather than a new behaviour born of climate-change induced desperation by bears near the southern limits of their range, this is a relatively rare but not unheard-of hunting strategy used by a few ingenious bears in at least one other known location where beluga mothers and calves congregate in large numbers in summer.

4. During the 1980s, polar bears in western Hudson Bay region spent about 4 months on shore during the summer, during which time most of them fasted after an intensive feeding period in early spring. For the past two decades, these bears have spent on average three weeks longer ashore than they did in the 1980s. Several recent papers by polar bear biologists have stated clearly that this ice-free summer period has not been getting progressively longer in recent years as implied in the BBC sequence. In addition, for the past three years at least, ice conditions in Hudson Bay have been much like they were in the 1980s - not worse. Bears have come ashore fat and healthy since 2016. This means that if the footage shown in the BBC series was shot anytime since the summer of 2016, conditions for polar bears in this region were better than they had been in decades, not symptomatic of a dying Arctic.

5. The bears shown hunting beluga whales from the shore of Hudson Bay were neither starving nor desperate: they were already fat and healthy after feeding on young seal the previous spring. And other bears were hardly 'not so lucky': virtually all bears in the region have been reported as fat and healthy in recent years by various agencies, including the Churchill Polar Bear Alert Program.

A simple Google search would have revealed these facts, the 1990 paper by Smith and Sjare on the Somerset Island observations and information about western Hudson Bay ice conditions since 1999, which means the BBC production crew were either incredibly incompetent or duplicitous.

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We have therefore filed an official complaint about this gross misrepresentation of natural polar bear behaviour and habitat conditions.

Yours sincerely



Dr Benny Peiser  
Director

## References

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