

# Cecil, Nanuq and Inuk

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*Public outrage over the death of Cecil the lion at the hands of a sport hunter is calling into question the Canadian polar bear sport hunt—and threatening the valuable cultural and economic benefits that Canadian Inuit gain from it.*

Amidst the [whirlwind of outrage](#) surrounding the death of Cecil the lion last month, it's easy to lose sight of the facts. Here's a fact that might surprise Canadians. Walter Palmer, the infamous American bow-hunter who killed the famous Zimbabwean lion for sport, also travelled to far northern Canada to kill a polar bear. We know this because we know that Mr Palmer has in fact [killed a polar bear](#), and because we also know that Canada has been the only country in the world to [allow a polar bear sport hunt](#) since 1973.

Unlike Cecil the lion—unhappily named after Africa's most prominent British colonialist—the polar bear that Mr Palmer killed somewhere in Arctic Canada had no name to make it seem more personable. Nor was it a valuable tourist attraction in itself. Whilst tourists do visit the Arctic in the hope of seeing a polar bear, there's no particular polar bear they hope to see. In Zimbabwe, by contrast, groups of well-heeled tourists prepared to [pay up to US\\$9,800 per day](#) to catch a glimpse of the regal Cecil are now [cancelling their bookings](#).

These tourists are sending an unmistakable message to authorities in Zimbabwe about the economic value of lions—however [unknown to ordinary Zimbabweans](#) Cecil himself actually was. In [Hwange National Park](#)—on the trail to the immensely popular Victoria Falls, easily accessible by road and boasting enviable tourist facilities—ecotourism plays a significant role in unlocking that value. Cecil was so [accustomed to people](#) that he would suffer eager tourists to approach within ten metres of him. The source of perhaps hundreds of thousands of dollars of ecotourism revenues in his thirteen-year life, in death Cecil was worth just US\$50,000—the approximate price Mr Palmer

paid to get a sporting chance at him. Coincidentally or not, this isn't [too far off the going rate](#) that Mr Palmer probably paid for his polar bear as well.

Of course, it's certainly possible for the ecotourism and sport hunting industries to operate profitably together—just as they did in Hwange. Some [conservation biologists have argued](#) that, like ecotourism, properly regulated “conservation hunting” can provide the income and incentives for local communities to live alongside dangerous or nuisance animals without exterminating them. The furious debate sparked by Cecil's death [has already divided](#) hunting apologists and animal activists along these lines.

### **From Africa to the Arctic**

But let's set aside that debate for now. Imagine instead that Cecil the lion lived somewhere as chock-full of spectacular wildlife as Hwange, yet so remote of access and bereft of holiday facilities that ecotourism is still more [future potential](#) than present earner. Imagine that you live there too, but in poverty, and that Mr Palmer has just offered you US\$50,000 to guide him to a lion. Your government sanctions the sport hunting of lions within a strict quota system based on the best scientific advice, and your traditional hunting community is one of just a handful with access to this quota. You see few ecotourists, and they spend little because you have little they want to buy. What then?

In fact, you don't have to imagine such a place. It approximates the reality in many of the small, far-flung communities of Arctic Canada. The Inuit people living there have the exclusive indigenous right to hunt polar bears for food and fur, as their ancestors traditionally did. But they must hunt under such [strict regulations](#) that even self-defence kills count against the total quota. They also have the right to sell quota to sport hunters, so long as sport hunters then hire Inuit guides and dog-teams at a typical cost between US\$30,000 and US\$50,000. On top of that income, Inuit keep the meat from the sport hunt, which they consider delicious even if sport hunters might not.

Given these benefits, it's easy to see why Canada established and promoted the polar bear sport hunt as an economic development opportunity for Inuit. Especially after the 1983 European ban on the seal fur trade [wiped out around 60 percent](#) of Inuit community income, impoverishing them overnight, the government hoped the sport hunt could replace some of that loss, or at least keep the welfare bill down. For their part, Inuit were at first reluctant to adopt the sport hunt, which is no more part of their traditional culture than ecotourism is.

Even today a few Inuit communities in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and Nunavut—which split from the NWT in 1999—decline to host a polar bear sport hunt at all.

But those communities that do host one have chosen it on their own authority, through their own local hunting and trapping associations. In this way, the Canadian polar bear sport hunt exemplifies the exercise of indigenous rights and indigenous decision-making under conditions of free, prior and informed consent. It's also a financial lifeline for some Inuit hunters, who'd take polar bears for food and fur in any case, but without the extra income. The major problem, it seems, is that the brokers who connect wealthy sport hunters with Inuit guides still manage to keep a substantial fraction of the profits for themselves.

Perhaps most importantly, the polar bear sport hunt offers at least some Inuit and their families the [means to maintain](#) a more traditional life on the land than they otherwise could through ordinary jobs—if any were available—or simply through welfare. This means the preservation of traditional knowledge and skills easily lost. Whatever its calculable economic benefits, the cultural benefits of the sport hunt are incalculable. Cecil the lion lived in a country where poor farmers have been [evicted from their land](#) so the rich can set up game ranches for the hunting trade. The polar bear that Mr Palmer killed lived in a country where Inuit have been [formally vested](#) with rights and title to their land so they can prosper from it.

### **The economics of polar bears**

Whatever the circumstances, however, hunting animals for sport in Arctic Canada is [just as controversial](#) as it is in Africa. In 2009, after a [careful joint study](#) of the economics of the polar bear sport hunt, the Humane Society International (HSI) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) concluded that its benefits are “far too limited and far too heavily concentrated in too few hands to amount to anything approximating a solution to the broader socio-economic troubles faced by Inuk [*sic*] people seeking to integrate subsistence food sourcing into their lives”. The implication? The polar bear sport hunt should be eliminated.

In support of their conclusion, HSI and IFAW rightly point out that only about a third of Inuit communities in Nunavut and the NWT regularly host polar bear sport hunts, and only another half do so sporadically. They also rightly point out that the income generated from the polar bear sport hunt in Nunavut amounts to

a mere one-tenth of one percent of the territory's GDP. And because an Inuk hunter can't open his wallet and spend GDP to provide for his family, HSI and IFAW go on to point out—again rightly—that polar bear sport hunt income doesn't even amount to more than a few percent of the total income of all the Inuit households in any Nunavut or NWT community.

So far, so good. But it's hardly a surprise that a very limited hunt of a relatively scarce animal doesn't provide enough income to enough Inuit to solve their "broader socio-economic troubles". Whatever the government had hoped of the polar bear sport hunt, that would be a fantasy. It's surely more pertinent to examine instead whether the polar bear sport hunt offers something approaching real financial help to Inuit in need.

Most of the Inuit communities studied by HSI and IFAW have a median income little more than half that of Canada as a whole. Most receive more than twice the amount of government transfers as a share of total community income than is doled out in Canada as a whole. Most have unemployment rates exceeding 20 or even 30 percent—many times that of Canada as a whole. Given these [social conditions](#), it seems slightly disingenuous for HSI and IFAW to argue that the income from a small and legally restricted sport hunt compares unfavourably with total industrial output in Nunavut. If income from the sport hunt were compared to, say, the welfare bill in Nunavut communities instead, the story would look rather different.

The table below tells that story. In the seven communities that accounted for 75 percent of all polar bear sport hunts in Nunavut between 2000 and 2008, the income from those hunts was worth nearly a third of the government's welfare bill. And in the "[High Arctic exile](#)" communities of Grise Fiord and Resolute—whose original inhabitants nearly starved to death after Canada relocated them there in order to assert sovereignty over unoccupied land—the sport hunt provides multiple times the income that welfare does. Welfare data for NWT communities hosting sport hunts were not available, but it's very likely that the results would look similar.

## POLAR BEAR SPORT HUNT AND WELFARE INCOME IN NUNAVUT

Community*	Inuit house-holds**	Inuit median income (C\$)**	Inuit unemployment rate**	Annual welfare income (C\$)***	Annual polar bear sport hunt income (C\$)****	Polar bear sport hunt income as share of welfare income
Arctic Bay	140	11,872	26%	652,708	120,517	18%
Clyde River	160	13,440	25%	944,613	143,520	15%
Coral Harbour	180	13,376	21%	826,602	169,312	20%
Grise Fiord	n/a	n/a	n/a	75,010	145,645	194%
Pond Inlet	270	16,304	24%	942,446	96,490	10%
Qikiqtarjuaq	120	16,352	33%	427,209	140,600	33%
Resolute	n/a	n/a	n/a	65,153	361,000	554%
TOTAL				3,933,741	1,177,084	30%

\*Communities accounting for aggregate 75% of polar bear sport hunts in Nunavut between 2000 and 2008

\*\*Data sourced from Statistics Canada, 2006 Aboriginal Population Profile

\*\*\*Data sourced from Government of Nunavut, 2006 tax year

\*\*\*\*Data sourced from HSI/IFAW, "Economics of polar bear trophy hunting in Canada" (2009)

n/a - Data unavailable due to data quality or privacy reasons; <100 households each

Now, these results don't mean that polar bear sport hunt income is actually replacing a third of the government's welfare bill in these communities. Welfare eligibility rules are complex, and each individual case would have to be assessed using data that isn't publicly available for privacy reasons. But considering the dearth of jobs in Inuit communities—as illustrated by the high unemployment figures above—polar bear sport hunt income couldn't easily be replaced except by welfare. So it appears that the sport hunt does offer real financial help to Inuit communities in need—as well as a measure of real self-reliance.

### Collateral damage

In fairness to HSI and IFAW, they are alive to these concerns. They recognise that "it would be wrong to pretend that the demise of polar bear trophy hunting will have no economic impact on anyone in Nunavut or the Northwest Territories". But they are also certain that "it would likewise be wrong to pretend that polar bear trophy hunting made attainment of a land-based lifestyle feasible for large numbers of people". In their view, it's too insignificant to be much of a loss—especially given moral qualms about killing polar bears for sport.

Once again, this is dubious reasoning. No one pretends that the polar bear sport hunt will ever employ large numbers of Inuit—or that it should. Inuit value highly the animals they have always depended upon—arguably more than animal activists do—and there simply aren't enough polar bears. But there also aren't many Inuit—no more than a thousand households in the seven communities profiled above. Even if the polar bear sport hunt makes a "decisive economic difference" to only "several dozen individuals" as HSI and IFAW

suggest, then perhaps one out of every ten Inuit households there reap the benefits—both financially and culturally. And those households matter.

It's one thing to oppose killing an animal like Cecil the lion—or Nanuq the polar bear—just to put a trophy on the wall. But it's another to oppose Inuk the hunter who has the chance to generate much-needed income whilst keeping his traditional culture alive. Considering that he must draw from his own subsistence quota to do so, and that he would hunt the same polar bears for food anyway, it seems uncharitable to bar him from realising any complementary financial benefit at the same time.

Thirty years ago, in a fit of disgust with hunting for fur, the world community effectively barred Inuit from realising the complementary financial benefits from their subsistence hunt for ringed seal. The result was widespread poverty across Arctic Canada that the polar bear sport hunt was intended to help alleviate. Since then, the world community has [twice considered](#) banning international trade in polar bear, though so far [without agreement](#). They may well [reconsider it in 2016](#)—and if they do agree this time, it will throw another needless obstacle in the way of securing human lives and livelihood in the Canadian Arctic.

Indeed, thanks to worries about the effects of climate change on polar bears, it's been [illegal since 2008](#) to import polar bear trophies into the USA, where many big-game sport hunters originate. And thanks to the death of Cecil the lion, a number of major airlines have adopted policies against [carrying hunting trophies](#) irrespective of their source or legality. Critical eyes are already [looking northward](#) at the Canadian hunt. In today's fit of disgust with hunting for sport, we run the risk of thoughtlessly damaging economically fragile Inuit communities, just as we once did over hunting for fur. Let's not make that same mistake again.

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