

*Memorandum 2/11/2018*

## **KNO8: The problem of the polar bear: Does the symbol of the Arctic prevent us from fixing the Arctic?**

This memo provides a summary of reports submitted on the session KNO8 organized at the Arctic Biodiversity Session in Rovaniemi, Finland, October 9-12 organized by WWF.

**Attendance:** 55

**Arctic Biodiversity Assessment recommendation themes most prominently addressed in the session:**

- Improving knowledge and public awareness
- Mainstreaming biodiversity

**Key points raised in the session that were important to note:**

- Story-telling is an important way to engage audiences on the importance of nature and biodiversity.
- We must tell more stories about the people who live in the Arctic and go beyond just focusing on iconic species like polar bears. Unless we communicate more about the region people will not develop a deeper understanding of the urgent need to address climate change.
- We need to find different ways of telling the wider story of biodiversity loss to different types of people all over the world.
- Connecting people in the south and east with Arctic issues is a challenge that requires thinking beyond the polar bear to deeper stories.
- "Facts prove, stories move"
- Challenges to raise awareness: awareness raising is an effort that never stops, and needs to be adaptive and responsive to inputs and messages from the audience
- Responsiveness to input from social media: nowadays, audiences provide very important feedback through social media, being paramount to be responsive to these stimuli
- Adaptive communications strategy: a communications strategy must be therefore flexible, adaptive, and in constant mutation to adapt to market needs and signals, as well as to changing objectives and priorities.
- External communications are important, but also internal: you need to raise awareness as well within your own organization, in order to create a common understanding of programme and project objectives and therefore help fundraising efforts as well as the conveying of a common message.
- Findings on how people lack awareness about biodiversity and how it affects their lives demonstrated a need for further efforts in this respect.

**Recommendations/actions identified for how to deal with the issues raised in the session:**

- The popularity of polar bears can be a way to start a conversation with audiences about the Arctic but we must be more creative in connecting our broader work in the Arctic through digital storytelling, websites and social media.

- Talk more about why your research is important and less about the process of the research or the results.
- The power of storytelling - not just presenting facts, but couching them in stories
- Understanding audience insights and behaviours to better connect with them
- Importance of reaching the wider audience: through their pressure on decision makers and the private sector changes can happen

**Take home message from the session:**

- Think about how you can inspire understanding of the importance of nature through creative storytelling that goes beyond the polar bear.
- Tackling biodiversity loss (and more broadly all environmental issues) requires a fundamental shift from broadcasting generic messages to telling engaging, personally relevant stories that drive home the issue in a way that people all over the world can understand and appreciate.
- Communications play a key role on raising awareness for environmental and biodiversity issues. However, in order to be efficient, communication activities cannot be limited to transmitting facts, but rather focus on storytelling. It is a step beyond flagship species, towards connecting the stories on how these and other biodiversity connect with people around and with other issues.