



Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada)
SUBMISSION
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS
December 2023

Recommendation: ICC Canada requests that Inuit play a key role in the management of seal species in the Arctic, leading co-generated knowledge research and the development of Inuit protected areas

Honourable Senators, thank you for the invitation to contribute to your report on Canada's seal populations and their effect on Canada's fisheries. Inuit have managed and relied on seals in the Arctic for millennia.

I am from Puvirnituk, Nunavik. I am sharing my thoughts with you not only as an Inuk who grew up on a nutritious diet of country food that included seal meat, and winter clothes made for me from sealskin, but also as the President of Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada (ICC Canada). ICC Canada represents Canadian Inuit on the international stage. My work at ICC Canada focuses on advocating for Inuit interests in self-determination, social justice, and protection of the environment, culture and language. I am also the Vice President International of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the national voice for Inuit in Canada.

Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada is part of the larger ICC organization that represents Inuit from Canada, Greenland, Chukotka, and Alaska. Inuit Circumpolar Council was founded in 1977 in Utqiagvik, Alaska to address the impacts of Arctic development on marine mammals, our food security and culture. Inuit have paid a heavy cost from decisions made in capitals far from our communities. The efforts of animal rights groups to end commercial sealing impacted our Indigenous rights to harvest seals, our harvesters were vilified, our communities suffered terrible losses. These decisions heavily impacted our communities, our families, our culture and our food security.

In this submission I want to share with you who ICC is, what we do and why we are interested in the important discussion on sealing.

The goals of the ICC, as outlined in the ICC Charter signed in 1977, are to strengthen unity among Inuit of the circumpolar region; promote Inuit rights and interests on an international level; develop and encourage long-term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment; and seek full and active partnership in the political, economic, and social development of circumpolar regions. Inuit leadership in many arenas, including through the ICC, has been

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longstanding including Governor General Mary Simon who was the former ICC Canada President and International Chair.

Inuit Circumpolar Council unites Inuit across the circumpolar homeland of Inuit Nunaat and advocates for the approximately 180,000 Inuit across the Arctic. Inuit are a circumpolar people divided by state borders in our recent history. Inuit have long shared a single identity and values across the Arctic. We are one people and one nation bound by culture and language.

Inuit Circumpolar Council represents Inuit priorities in global decision-making processes. This year marks the 40th anniversary that the ICC has had consultative status at the United Nations, a goal first stated in 1977 that only took six years for Inuit to achieve. We are also permanent participants at the Arctic Council and the only Indigenous organization to have provisional consultative status at the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

We are a maritime people, as such, we depend on the resources the land, coasts, oceans and ice provides. In turn, we have for millenia conserved these resources, valued them, and protected them. Our Indigenous Knowledge and Inuit laws (Maligait) supported our harvesting decisions.

Indigenous Knowledge is a systematic way of thinking applied to phenomena across biological, physical, cultural, and spiritual systems. It includes insights based on evidence acquired through direct and long-term experiences and extensive and multigenerational observations, lessons, and skills. It has developed over millennia and is still developing in a living process, including knowledge acquired today and in the future, and it is passed on from generation to generation.

ICC Indigenous Knowledge definition quoted in Food Sovereignty and Self-Governance, pg. 20

Our leadership, as demonstrated at the IMO and the adoption of our recommendation to have Indigenous Knowledge considered in underwater noise guidelines shows how Inuit led initiatives can have global impact; impacts that benefit all who are connected to our Arctic oceans. Our continued efforts to gain permanent consultative status at the IMO are founded on Indigenous Knowledge and understanding of the complex Arctic ecosystem and our ability to speak to the global importance of responsible activities in the Arctic.

Inuit capacity to contribute understanding in all issues of maritime interest, and in recognition of changes and increases in vessel traffic and the need for a safer Arctic, is also exemplified in Qanittaq: The Clean Arctic Shipping Initiative. Qanittaq is a partnership co-lead and co-developed by ICC Canada and Memorial University to “generate the knowledge to support safe and sustainable Arctic shipping.” This collaboration has received over \$91 million in federal funding, acknowledging Inuit as world leaders to help find solutions to address the increasing challenges in the Arctic due to climate change.

Inuit connection to the complex Arctic marine ecosystem is also apparent in our leadership in species and ecosystem management. Inuit Circumpolar Council was recently awarded the United Nations Development Programme Equator Prize for the work between Greenland and Canada on Pikialasorsuaq, also known as Sarvarjuaq in Canada. Pikialasorsuaq, “great upwelling” in Kalaallisut, is a shared polynya between Greenland and Canada. Inuit have managed and used these waters for food security, culture and knowledge for millennia. The impacts of climate change and increased anthropogenic activities threaten this area and the ability for Inuit to access traditional livelihoods. Inuit involvement to further Inuit priorities in this region, in partnership with the Canadian Government and Kingdom of Denmark are crucial for the preservation of biodiversity in Pikialasorsuaq.

This summer Inuit from across the Arctic met in Ilulissat, Greenland for the 2023 Inuit Delegates Meeting and for the Arctic Peoples’ Conference. The central theme of the meeting was asserting Inuit rights at the international level as a unified circumpolar people. The Ilulissat Declarations include seven priority areas: good governance, security and Inuit Nunaat, health and wellness, language and culture, Arctic Ocean and the marine environment, infrastructure deficit, and hunting and food security.

The importance of hunting and food security to Inuit has been outlined in the ICC report *Food Sovereignty and Self-Governance: Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources (2020)*. Inuit food security is based on interconnected components that include a healthy environment, Inuit culture, Indigenous Knowledge, and Inuit decision-making power and management.

Ecosystem management is not a new concept to Inuit. Inuit have governed and holistically cared for the marine environment across Inuit Nunaat for millennia. We know everything in the marine realm is connected. The seals are dependent on the snow and ice and on the fish; we are in turn dependent on the seal. If it were not for the seal, I would not be here today.

As stated in the Inuit Circumpolar Council *Food Sovereignty and Self-Governance: Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources* report, “We have been sustaining this environment for thousands of years without degrading it. Resources keep coming back to us, year after year. And that is one thing millions of people in the world misunderstand: we are actually part of the environment.”

Because we are part of the environment, the impacts of climate change in the Arctic are felt directly by Inuit. Our ability to hunt is changing because of changes in sea ice and to the rhythm of the seasons. We face new safety risks due to thin ice in areas that used to provide safe passage. Species are also changing behaviour in response to climate change. For example, ringed seals are using different areas than previously used due to changes in availability of ice.

In my home of Puvirnituaq there are fewer seals, walrus, and whales. The ringed seals are not as healthy as they once were. Hunters have to travel farther to find certain species and there are fewer “good” hunting days.

Although the Arctic is changing, Inuit have always adapted.

Our implicit understanding of the effects of climate change means that management of Arctic species and ecosystems requires Inuit input to be effective. Our Indigenous Knowledge needs to be considered at all tables and included in all management activities in the Arctic. Our involvement is our fundamental right, upheld by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The harvest of seals is vitally important to Inuit across Inuit Nunangat, our homeland in Canada, and Inuit Nunaat, our circumpolar homeland. Seals are important culturally and for subsistence activities. We use seal skin for clothing and craft, and also sell them, and we share the meat between families.

Harvesting seals also provides an opportunity to pass on Inuit Knowledge to younger generations, creating a deep understanding of the importance of these species, and a deep understanding of how to manage them.

In the past, decisions of what can be done with harvested seals have been decided by those with limited understanding of where we live and how Inuit rely on these species. In 1983 the European Union banned the trade of white-coat and blue-back seal skins. The ban on trade of these skins, now enforced by over 30 nations, had direct and severe economic and social impacts on Inuit.

We were excluded from the global market, because of a decision that did not include Inuit, our knowledge, we were by-catch.

The management of seal populations in Canada have often relied on methods rooted in colonial frameworks, without the participation of Inuit who have observed seals for generations. The extent of Indigenous Knowledge on seal species is vast and critical to include for effective species management in a changing Arctic.

Only recently has COSEWIC recognized the value of Indigenous Knowledge in managing seal species in Canada through the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee. These efforts to include Indigenous Knowledge are a move in the right direction but Inuit lead ecosystem management in the Arctic is the most effective path forward for Canada to not only manage seal populations but also to meet Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets.

The Arctic has been a challenging environment for non-Inuit led research to provide a full understanding of the ecosystem and the roles of seal species in it. This has led to knowledge gaps. Technology has played an important role in understanding seal behaviour and habitat use, through satellite movement data for example. Although this research provides important insights it is also limited in its scope. Co-generated knowledge, including both Indigenous Knowledge and knowledge holders and science and scientists will provide the depth of understanding of what is happening to the seals population across the Arctic.

For Inuit, the Arctic is our homeland, Inuit Nunaat. Indigenous Knowledge of seals in the Arctic is part of who we are and our culture. Our Knowledge of seals should play an important and real role in how Canada manages Arctic seal species. Inuit leadership in seal management can provide Canada, not just Inuit, a foundation for species management rooted in place and with the security of knowing this work is based on generations of Indigenous Knowledge.

ICC Canada requests that Inuit play a key role in the management of seal species in the Arctic, leading co-generated knowledge research and the development of Inuit protected areas.

Nakurmik,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk', written in a cursive style.

Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk

President, Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada