



INUIT

Press Release

ICC Pikialasorsuaq Commission Shaping Recommendations from Community Testimony

February 24, 2017 – Ottawa, Ontario - The ICC Pikialasorsuaq Commissioners met this week to consider the wealth of testimony they heard over the summer and fall in Canada and Greenland on the past, present and future of the Pikialasorsuaq. The Pikialasorsuaq, *The Great Upwelling*, is also referred to as the North Water Polynya in the northern part of Baffin Bay.

“The ICC Pikialasorsuaq Commission process started in the communities and it is our intention as Commissioners to recognize these valuable voices”, stated Okalik Egeesiak, Inuit Circumpolar Council Chair. Kuupik Kleist, the Greenland Commissioner continued, “The Pikialasorsuaq Commission process has been conceived from the bottom up”. The Commission travelled to and heard from the communities most closely associated with the Pikialasorsuaq and are now developing the report and recommendations. The next step for the Commissioners is to shape these community voices and visions into recommendations. The report will be structured around a number of key principles that communities expressed as important and that define the communities relationship with the Pikialasorsuaq and their vision for the future.

The geographical region the Commission is considering is primarily the actual polynya however, “we heard from all communities that the larger cultural region surrounding the Pikialasorsuaq is influenced by the health of the Pikialasorsuaq,” noted Eva Aariak, Canadian Commissioner. Kuupik Kleist noted, “that rapid and unpredictable Arctic climate change threatens the integrity of the Pikialasorsuaq and the precautionary principle must be employed.”

Key principles the Commissioners drew from the communities were, “that the people of the Pikialasorsuaq are one people united by family bonds, history, culture, and Inuit knowledge, and that the Pikialasorsuaq is one ecosystem divided in two countries”, Eva Aariak noted. “We clearly heard that hunting the bounty of the Pikialasorsuaq remains the center of Inuit food security, culture and that the preservation for future generations of this biological wealth is paramount”, offered Egeesiak. Kuupik Kleist, acknowledged that “conservation can be compatible with Inuit self-determination and community economic development and the Commission is shaping our recommendations to reflect this vision.”

“We envision the establishment of an Inuit led Pikialasorsuaq Management Area, with oversight through a yet to be defined governance structure. This body will oversee the management, monitoring of the cumulative impacts of outside activity including shipping, fishing, tourism, non-renewable and renewable resources”, offered Aariak. “This was a collective recommendation from all communities and further, that this should include a comprehensive and sustainable community based monitoring regime”, Egeesiak added. The Commission is also considering recommendations to reduce barriers to travel the Pikialasorsuaq and between adjacent communities to re-establish family ties, maintain culture, food security and sustainable community economic development.

Other priorities are being considered in the recommendations include the central value of Inuit knowledge to inform any actions in the Pikialasorsuaq, consideration of the role of youth in any management plan of the Pikialasorsuaq to ensure their future is protected, and issues of search and rescue and environmental response.

The Commissioners will bring their draft key principles and recommendations back to communities in April and May prior to the mid-summer release of the final report. The return to the communities is to ensure their work reflects the voice and vision of Inuit that so freely and generously gave of their time and knowledge.

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Pikialasorsuaq, or “Great Upwelling”, is the largest Arctic polynya and the most biologically productive region north of the Arctic Circle. Pikialasorsuaq has been recognized by Inuit for generations as critical habitat. Communities in the Qikiqtani and Avanersuaq regions continue to rely on the polynya’s biological productivity. Pikialasorsuaq is vital to many migratory species upon which these communities, as well as farther afield, depend. In some recent years, the northern ice bridge in Kane Basin, Nares Straight and Smith Sound (Ikeq) has become less reliable and the polynya less defined. The consequences of these changes, linked to larger climatic shifts observable in many parts of the Arctic, are not known.

Led by three Commissioners, Okalik Egeesiak (chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council) the International Commissioner, Eva Aariak (former Premier of Nunavut) the Canadian Commissioner, and Kuupik Kleist (former Greenland Premier) the Greenland Commissioner, the Pikialasorsuaq Commission is mandated to conduct consultations in the communities in Nunavut and Greenland that are closely connected to Pikialasorsuaq. With the support of the Oak Foundation, Oceans North and World Wildlife Fund the Commissioners have undertaken consultations with Canadian Inuit communities in April (Grise Fiord, Resolute, Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet and Clyde River) and is currently in Northern Greenland to hear from Inuit on the Greenlandic side of the Pikialasorsuaq (Siorapaluk, Qaanaaq, Savissivik, Kullorsuaq, Nuussuaq and Upernavik). The consultations are designed to facilitate local and regional input, to incorporate indigenous knowledge, and to recommend an Inuit strategy for safeguarding, monitoring and management of the health of Pikialasorsuaq for future generations.