



## Press Release

### **ICC's Pikialasorsuaq Commission Workshop to discuss how the Pikialasorsuaq can be managed by Inuit**

May 28, 2018, Nuuk, Greenland. The Pikialasorsuaq Commission is hosting an international workshop that will gather approximately 30 - 40 representatives from the Pikialasorsuaq region, Inuit organizations, the scientific community, Government Representatives from Greenland, The Government of Canada and NGO's.

The three-day workshop follows the Commission's report "People of the Ice Bridge – The Future of the Pikialasorsuaq"<sup>1</sup>, and builds on the Commission's recommendations for greater local stewardship of this shared marine region. Participants will, among other issues, explore options for Pikialasorsuaq to manage and monitor the area, to lead in its conservation and to promote local involvement in scientific research in the region. Participants will also discuss strategies aimed at removing travel barriers for people living in the communities adjacent to Pikialasorsuaq.

The workshop will focus on collaboration between Inuit living in the area and stakeholders. The Commission hopes this workshop will encourage the scientific community (both academic institutions as well as government research bodies) to explore ways to work with Arctic communities in the development of research mandates and to involve communities in the actual research in the Pikialasorsuaq region.

Shared by Canada and Greenland, Pikialasorsuaq is the largest Arctic polynya (an area of year-round open water) and is part of the most biologically productive region north of the Arctic Circle, providing critical habitat for migratory species (e.g. seabirds, narwhal, arctic cod, and seals) upon which Inuit depend.

The polynya is formed by an ice bridge, connecting Ellesmere Island to Northwest Greenland that served as a migration corridor for Inuit for thousands of years. The northern ice bridge has become less reliable – in warmer years, the polynya fills with ice and, now, does not always form in critical winter months. The consequences of these changes, linked to larger climatic shifts observable in many parts of the Arctic, are not known.

This region has attracted significant scientific interest since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Inuit have lived, traveled and harvested in this region for centuries. This workshop seeks to identify a framework for management options that bring together local knowledge experts, Governments, scientific research and NGO's for a shared and sustainable management model for this great region.

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*ABOUT THE PIKIALASORSUAQ COMMISSION*

The Inuit-led Pikialasorsuaq Commission is led by three Commissioners. The Commissioners are: ICC Chair, Okalik Egeesiak is the International Commissioner; former Nunavut Premier, Eva Aariak has been appointed as the Canadian Commissioner; and, former Greenland Premier, Kuupik Kleist will be the Greenland Commissioner.

The North Water polynya is an area of open water surrounded by sea ice. It is the largest one in the Northern Hemisphere and the most biologically productive ecosystem north of the Arctic Circle. It lies in northern Baffin Bay between Greenland and Canada's Ellesmere Island near Smith Sound and Nares Strait and is an important marine area for Inuit and the species upon which high Arctic communities rely.

The North Water is an area vulnerable to climate change. Inuit in the region have expressed a desire to explore locally-driven management options in advance of increased shipping, tourism, fishing, and non-renewable resource exploration/development. The Commission's mandate will be to listen to Inuit community members and knowledge holders who use and depend on this region about their vision for the North Water's future use and cooperation.

Current support for the Commission has been provided by Oceans North Canada, the Oak Foundation and World Wildlife Fund Canada, while additional funds are being sought.