



Press Release

ICC's Pikialasorsuaq Commission Workshop Concludes with an Implementation Plan: Moving Forward with the Recommendations

May 31, 2018, Nuuk, Greenland. The Pikialasorsuaq Commission today concluded an international workshop with a roadmap for implementing the 2017 recommendations. The workshop was attended by representatives from the Canadian and Greenlandic communities who live and use the Pikialasorsuaq, Inuit organizations, the scientific community, Government Representatives from Greenland, the Government of Canada and NGO's. "The Pikialasorsuaq is not just an ocean, or a unique wildlife area impacted by climate change. This is our home our Nuna. This shared body of water defines who we are as a people – it connects us" said Okalik Egeesiak, Chair of ICC and International Pikialasorsuaq Commissioner.

The objective of the three-day workshop was to discuss and develop an implementation plan for the recommendations contained in the 2017 Commission's report, "People of the Ice Bridge – The Future of the Pikialasorsuaq"¹. Kuupik Kleist, Pikialasorsuaq Commissioner for Greenland stated, "The Commission is responding to the communities, who have called for greater local stewardship of this shared marine region through an Inuit Management Authority, an Inuit led monitoring regime and through free mobility to travel across the Pikialasorsuaq".

Participants discussed the current governance of the Pikialasorsuaq, existing monitoring and research programs among many other issues. Importantly communities from the Pikialasorsuaq spoke to community priorities that will define the implementation of the Commission's work to manage and monitor the area, to lead in its conservation and to promote local involvement in scientific research in the region.

Eva Aariak, Canadian Pikialasorsuaq Commissioner, from Arctic Bay reflected on the emotion felt when she was reunited in 2016 with relatives in Qaanaaq. Removing travel barriers for people living in the communities adjacent to Pikialasorsuaq was at the heart of the Commission's work. Communities on both sides of the Pikialasorsuaq asked for free mobility between their communities to visit family and friends, preserve our language and cultural ties. "We travelled freely between our communities and not being able to visit family because of cost and documents is hard on our communities – we are one people." Action has already begun by the Government of Canada to determine how Inuit in the Pikialasorsuaq can move freely between Canada and Greenland.

During the workshop it was clear that there is support from the academic and government research community and local governments for collaboration between Inuit living in the area and produced an implementation framework for management options that brings together local knowledge experts, Governments, scientific research and NGO's for a shared and sustainable management model for this great region.

Egeesiak offered, "The work of the Pikialasorsuaq Commission may be a global model for Indigenous stewardship and supports the concept of self determination and Indigenous Protected Areas.

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ABOUT THE PIKIALASORSUAQ COMMISSION

The Inuit-led Pikialasorsuaq Commission is led by three Commissioners. The Commissioners are: ICC Chair, Okalik Eegeesiak 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 nonrenewable 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.