

# The Sea Ice is Our Highway

## An Inuit Perspective on Transportation in the Arctic



A Contribution to the Arctic Marine  
Shipping Assessment

March 2008



Inuit Circumpolar Council - Canada

## Acknowledgements:

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Canada would like to thank the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) for its financial support in the making of this report.

ICC Canada wishes also to thank the Inuit hunters who agreed to be interviewed regarding their use of sea ice and other related activities and experiences.

ICC Canada also expresses its appreciation to Chester Reimer Consulting Inc. (CRCI) for its assistance in helping prepare this report.

Photo Credit, p.1: H. Finkler.

## Executive Summary

### *Context:*

This report from the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Canada contributes to the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) being conducted by the Arctic Council. It provides the AMSA project with an Inuit perspective on the human dimension of shipping. As a Permanent Participant at the Arctic Council, ICC speaks on behalf of all 155,000 Inuit living in Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Russia.



### *Sources:*

The report investigates Inuit use of sea ice. It draws upon three sources:

- Thirty-year old land use and occupancy studies upon which the modern Inuit land claims agreements in Canada were based;
- Recent interviews with Inuit hunters in Canada; and
- Additional studies from Alaska and Greenland.

Parts of this report are written in the first person with Inuit telling their story.

### *Main Point:*

This report demonstrates unequivocally that life in the Arctic is dependent on movement, and that sea ice is integral to this movement. The Inuit have been a nomadic people living in the Arctic since ancient times: their entire culture and identity is based on free movement on the land. Inuit rely on free movement in order to eat, to obtain supplies for traditional clothing and art, and generally to keep their rich cultural heritage alive. Inuit temporarily move out from settlements to harvest resources that are sometimes bartered or traded. This movement takes place on the sea ice that surrounds and connects Inuit communities.

### *Key Findings:*

#### 1. Tradition and Adaptation

The key findings contained in this report begin with the recognition that Inuit are deeply connected to the past, both distant and more recent, but have also adapted. The report also finds that Inuit continue to eat traditional foods for a large portion of their diet. This diet requires continued hunting and harvesting of the available resources in the Arctic. Because the wildlife, birds and sea mammals that make up most of the Inuit diet are highly transient, it is often necessary for Inuit to travel over great distances in order to obtain a harvest sufficient to feed their communities.

Although climate change and thinning sea ice are posing great challenges, Inuit are a highly adaptive people who are seeking ways to cope with these changes while maintaining their culture. But in order for them to adapt, they must have free movement over sea ice and open sea in order to follow the migratory wildlife they rely on. It is also important to note that, as many of the hunters interviewed said, if one species in the food chain suffers, the others down the line suffer as well. Inuit will, therefore, be directly affected by any damage inflicted upon the Arctic environment -- one that they have sustained and been sustained by for thousands of years.

2. Standard of Sustainable Use

The Arctic is home to Inuit. They have lived there for thousands of years. It is the Inuit position that any action or intervention that affects their land must protect the environment, wildlife, and therefore the Inuit people in such a way that they can continue to live off this land for thousands more years. This is the standard of sustainable use that they insist upon.

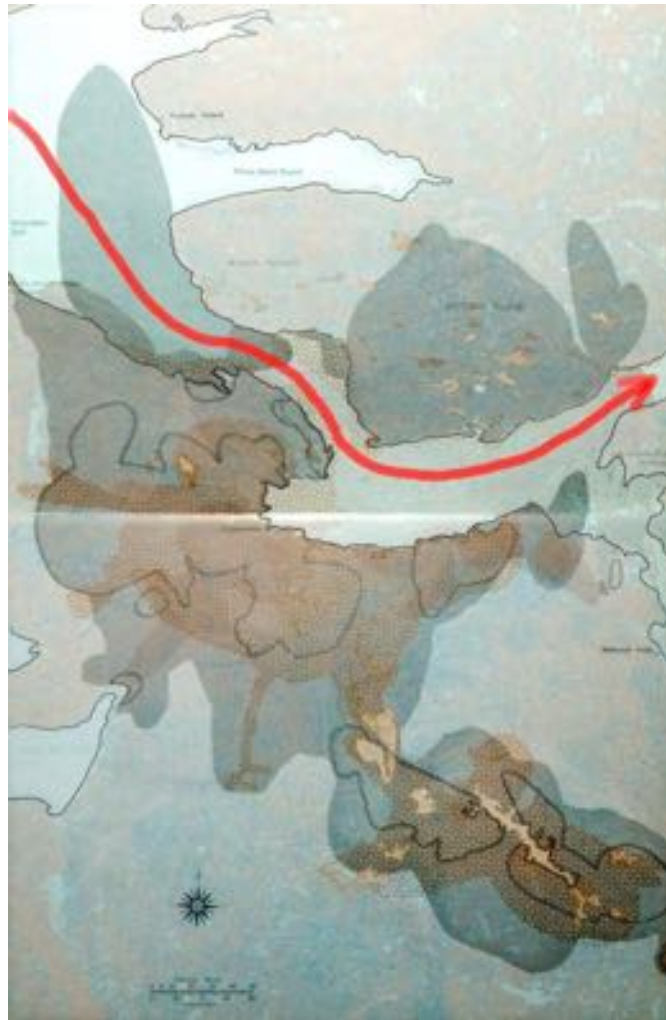
3. The Sea Ice is Our Highway

The sea, for Inuit, is their highway. In wintertime, their highway is sea ice. In summertime, it is the open sea. The sea is integral to the Inuit way of life. Because they still rely on traditional Inuit food for a large portion of their diet, and because hunting and being out on the land are central to their culture, they continue to use the land and sea in the same way as did their ancestors for thousands of years. This connection to land and ice gives Inuit a great sense of pride, well-being, and connection to the past.



*Caution and Concern:*

In the face of climate change and the potential for greater use of the Arctic by newcomers, there is a feeling of concern among Inuit. While they have resolved to adapt to the changed climate and thinning ice as best they can – and show considerable confidence they will succeed – they are less sure about what increased shipping may mean for their future. While the pages that follow do not overtly discuss constitutional and legal issues, Inuit – through ICC and other bodies – strongly caution those making plans regarding the Arctic to remember the land claims agreements, self-government arrangements, and international legal instruments that call for consultation and informed consent. And to pay close attention to the direct quotations of Inuit hunters found in this report. Newcomers are reminded that Inuit have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years and intend to live there for thousands more.



**Shipping route through Kugluktuk region illustrates colliding interests between Inuit land use and shipping.  
Map source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.**



# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary.....                                    | i  |
| 1. Introduction .....                                     | 1  |
| 1.1 Context.....  | 1  |
| 1.2 Inuit Definitions.....                                | 1  |
| 1.2.1 The Arctic.....                                     | 1  |
| 1.2.2 The Land .....                                      | 2  |
| 1.3 Scope of the Report .....                             | 2  |
| 2. Our Nomadic Tradition .....                            | 4  |
| 2.1 The Four Stages of Inuit History .....                | 4  |
| 2.2 Travellers and Nomads .....                           | 7  |
| 3. Moving to Follow the Game.....                         | 10 |
| 3.1 Continued Importance of Traditional Diet .....        | 10 |
| 3.2 Harvesting What the Land Provides.....                | 12 |
| 3.2.1 General Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Patterns.....  | 13 |
| 3.2.2 Regional Variations in Land Use and Occupancy ..... | 14 |
| Alaska .....  | 15 |
| Inuvialuit Settlement Region .....                        | 15 |
| Nunavut .....   | 16 |
| Nunavik.....  | 18 |
| Nunatsiavut .....   | 18 |
| Greenland.....  | 18 |
| 3.2.3 Necessity of Movement Over Land and Sea .....       | 19 |
| 3.3 Recent Adaptations.....                               | 20 |
| 4. Inuit Sustainability.....                              | 22 |
| 4.1 Sustainability, the Local Economy, and Shipping ..... | 23 |
| 5. Conclusion .....                                       | 27 |





# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

This report from the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Canada is a contribution to the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) being conducted by the Arctic Council. This scoping report is intended to provide the authors of the AMSA with an Inuit perspective on the human dimension of shipping. As a Permanent Participant at the Arctic Council, the Inuit Circumpolar Council speaks on behalf of all 155,000 Inuit living in Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Russia. ICC Canada represents Canadian Inuit on matters of international importance, and also acts as a representative for Inuit from Greenland, Alaska, and Russia within Canada.

This report is important because it gives voice to Inuit, the people who have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years, sustaining and being sustained by the unique animals, fish, and fowl found here. Governments and industry have for decades used this same Arctic for their own benefit. Sometimes they consult with us. In contrast to such consultations, this report comes on the initiative of ICC Canada and is intended to frame the dialogue from an Inuit perspective, to discuss the issues related to land and sea ice use as we see them. From this discussion, the reader will come to learn how ice is central to how we have moved in the past and continue to move in the present.



## 1.2 Inuit Definitions

### 1.2.1 The Arctic

The first distinction of an Inuit view of the Arctic is our definition of the term Arctic itself. Within Canada, Inuit view the Arctic as the places where Inuit have traditionally lived. These areas are the four land claims regions: Nunatsiavut along the coast of Labrador, Nunavik in Northern Quebec, the entire territory of Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region along the northern coast and around the northern islands of the Northwest Territories. Other indigenous peoples also live in the Canadian North, but because they are impacted less by shipping than are Inuit, their views are not covered in this report. The Arctic also includes all of Greenland, much of Alaska, from the North Slope Borough down the Bering coast, and much of Russia, certainly including the region of Chukotka across the Bering Strait from Alaska. These regions where Inuit live are all part of the Arctic according to our view.



**Circumpolar Map with Inuit lands highlighted**

The Arctic also includes the northern portions of Finland, Sweden and Norway where the Saami live, as well as the northern parts of Russia where nearly forty different indigenous peoples live. Our Arctic is increasingly the focus of attention from many outside interests, the latest of which is the shipping industry.

### **1.2.2 The Land**

The Inuit concept of land will be expanded upon in this report. When defining our “land”, Inuit do not distinguish between the ground upon which our communities are built and the sea ice upon which we travel, hunt, and build igloos as temporary camps. Land is anywhere our feet, dog teams, or snowmobiles can take us.

---

***Land is anywhere our feet, dog teams, or snowmobiles  
can take us***

---

### **1.3 Scope of the Report**

This report is a scoping level investigation focusing on Inuit use of sea ice. It looks at existing sources of information regarding land use and occupancy to extract the highlights regarding sea ice, augmenting this with responses from interviews with Inuit hunters, and using additional studies from Alaska and Greenland to provide a pan-Inuit perspective. The report will not provide comprehensive data on current Inuit use of sea ice, as such information is not yet available. It will also not use the AMSA’s target dates of 2020 and 2050 to make specific projections on how increased Arctic marine use by non-Inuit may affect the Inuit. Note that the report does include general predictions about the future in light of climate change

---

and reduced sea ice based on the experience and traditional knowledge of the Inuit hunters interviewed, but these predictions are not directed specifically to those target dates.

The central idea of this report is that life in the Arctic is dependent on movement, and that sea ice is integral to this movement. The Inuit have been a nomadic people living in the Arctic since ancient times. As such, our entire culture and identity is based on free movement on the land. Indeed, we rely on free movement in order to eat, first of all, and also to obtain supplies for traditional clothing and art as well as to maintain pride in our rich cultural heritage. We also temporarily move out from our settlements to harvest resources that we sometimes barter or trade. As this report will show, much of this movement takes place on the sea ice that surrounds and connects our communities.

---

***Life in the Arctic is dependent on movement, and sea ice is integral to this movement***

---

Because the goal of this report is to give voice to Inuit perspectives and concerns regarding the impact of changes in the Arctic, the text will include many direct quotations from interviews with Inuit. Many of the Inuit interviewed for this report emphasized the importance of the sea in their everyday lives, and were very concerned that their voices be heard by the people whose decisions will affect their culture and livelihoods. The use of direct quotes is our means of presenting their concerns to a wider public.

## 2. Our Nomadic Tradition

### 2.1 The Four Stages of Inuit History

According to the studies compiled in the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Report of 1976, Arctic historians and archeologists have found that Inuit populations have inhabited the Arctic for about 4000 years,<sup>1</sup> in nearly the same regions as they do today. This history began with the Pre-Dorset, Paleo-Eskimo people who lived in the Arctic starting around 2000 BC, then continued with the Dorset people who lived in Greenland starting in 1000 BC and in the Canadian Arctic from 500 BC, then on to the Thule people whose variation of Eskimo culture originated in what is now Alaska and spread across the Canadian Arctic to Greenland, all the way to the present-day Inuit. Historians and archeologists tell us that the cultural similarities seen in the prehistoric artifacts and the physical similarities discovered through the unearthing of ancient graves indicate a clear progression from the pre-Dorset, Paleo-Eskimo people through to today's Inuit.



---

***Virtually the whole Arctic region from Chukotka to Greenland was inhabited by people with a common culture***

---

Archeological findings from the Paleo-Eskimo era show that virtually the whole Arctic region from Chukotka to Greenland was inhabited by people with a common culture. They have found common tools adapted to the Arctic tundra in the region from the southeast coast of Siberia “across northern Alaska, the central Canadian Arctic and the eastern Arctic islands to Greenland” and “as far as northeastern and southwestern Greenland, Ungava peninsula in northern Quebec, and down through the Barren Lands and the west coast of Hudson Bay to Churchill, Manitoba.”<sup>2</sup> Though the groups who lived in this vast region had slight regional variations, they are similar enough that archeologists call them all the Arctic Small Tool tradition.<sup>3</sup> The nature and location of the remains of their camps indicate that they lived in “small, widely scattered, nomadic bands, moving seasonally to exploit various game resources. They used toggling harpoons, spears, lances, and bows and arrows in hunting caribou and seals.”<sup>4</sup> It appears they also fished extensively and hunted bears, wolves, musk-oxen and walruses.<sup>5</sup>

---

1 M.M.R. Freeman, ed. 1976. Inuit land use and occupancy project. 3 vols. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada. Vol. 2, p. 103-104.

2 William E. Taylor, Jr., “The Fragments of Eskimo Prehistory.” In Freeman, Vol. 2, p. 105.

3 Ibid. p. 105.

4 Ibid. p. 105.

5 Ibid. p. 106.

---



**Canadian site locations and presumptive land use: Early Paleo-Eskimo.  
Source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.**

The Dorset culture moved quite clearly out of this pre-Dorset, Arctic Small Tool tradition. The Dorset culture, which existed from 800 BC to 1300 AD, stretched from Bernard Harbour and Melville Island in the west to eastern Greenland and the northwest part of Labrador in the east. Like the Paleo-Eskimo people, the Dorset people “lived in small seasonally-nomadic bands with little camps of skin tents in summer, sheltering in winter in small clusters of partly-underground pit houses.”<sup>6</sup> The Dorset people apparently also used snow-houses and may in fact have invented them. The tools and weapons found in Dorset archeological sites indicate they hunted a variety of sea mammals, birds, and caribou, and also fished extensively. Following the tradition of the pre-Dorset culture, they used soapstone blubber-burning lamps for heat, light, cooking, and drying clothing,<sup>7</sup> a tradition which was later carried on by the Thule and Inuit people.

The Dorset people were gradually displaced by the Thule people between 900 and 1300 AD as the Thule people slowly drifted over from Alaska across the Canadian Arctic all the way to Greenland.<sup>8</sup> These two cultures were similar in many ways and learned from each other during the time they co-existed.<sup>9</sup>

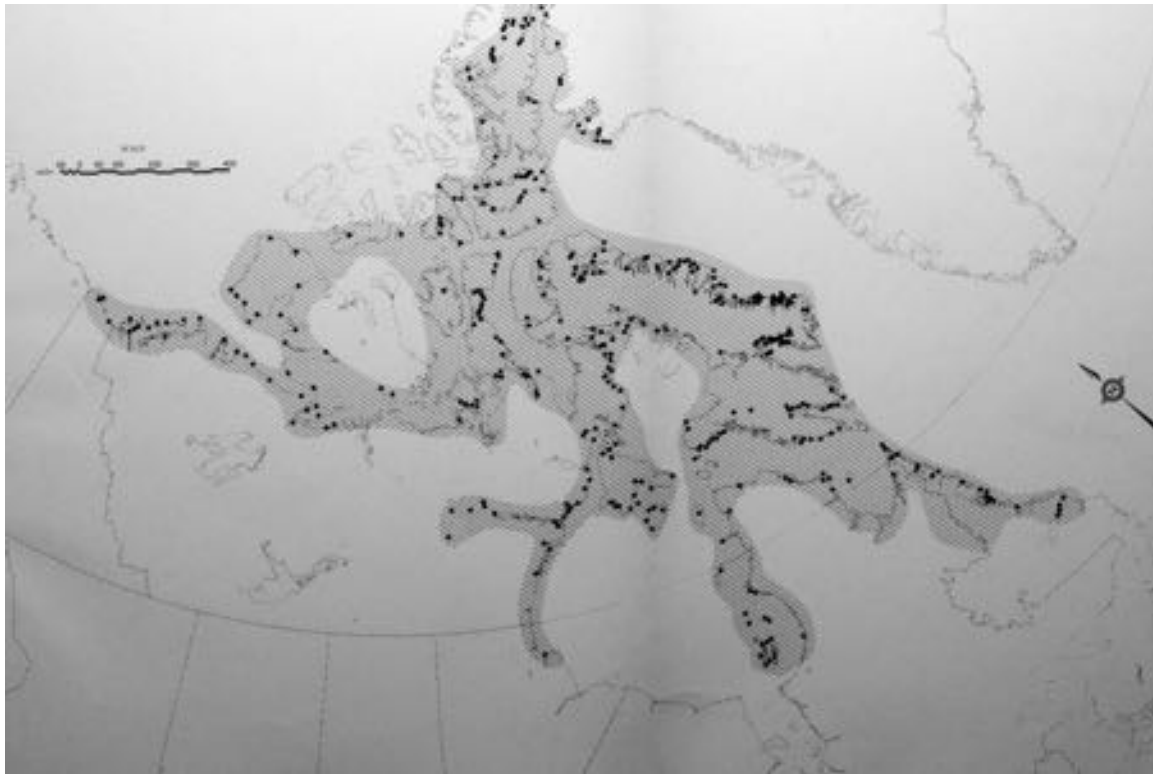
6 Taylor, Jr., In Freeman, Vol. 2, p. 106.

7 Ibid. p. 106.

8 Ibid. p. 107.

9 Ibid. p. 108.

However, the Thule culture was more effectively adapted to the Arctic because the people possessed dog-teams that allowed them to travel over greater distances more easily and they had developed a full range of gear for hunting the great baleen whales, which afforded them a major food supply not available to the Dorset people.<sup>10</sup> The prominence of the whale hunt is the primary distinguishing feature of the Thule era.



**Canadian site locations and presumptive land use in the Thule period.  
Source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.**

The most recent stage in Inuit history began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the people known as the Central Eskimo. This culture followed directly from the Thule culture, using virtually the same hunting equipment, modes of transportation, clothing, and even toys as the Thule people did. The primary differences between the Thule period and the Central Eskimo period came about because of the collapse of the baleen whale hunt. Without this major source of food, the Central Eskimo people abandoned the villages of sturdy winter houses from the Thule era for a more nomadic life dependent on the scattered herds of seals and walrus. During this time “there was a gradual shift to the snow-house on the sea ice as the customary winter residence.”<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, Jr., in Freeman, Vol. 2., p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 108.

---

***For thousands of years our forefathers have gone before us and passed on the traditions that still help us today***

---

Today's Inuit continue to benefit from this rich ancestry, knowing that for thousands of years our forefathers have gone before us and passed on the traditions that still help us today. Said one Inuk<sup>12</sup> from Igloodik, Nunavut:

*"We live here because our ancestors did before us. If they had not lived here, I don't know what we'd do, we wouldn't have anything. They tried hard to hunt animals in order to live – that's why we are living. Those old places are easy to spot. I've been to many places by dog-team in the direction of Pond Inlet and others, where you would have thought no people have ever been before. I've seen rocks piled one on top of the other. They were fixed like that by Inuit. They are everywhere."<sup>13</sup>*

Another Inuk from Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut put it this way:

*"Even when you go to a place you thought was empty, there is always something that tells you that people were there."<sup>14</sup>*

## 2.2 Travellers and Nomads

As indicated in this brief overview of Inuit history, Inuit have always relied on hunting for subsistence, a way of life that requires a great deal of movement in order to follow the migratory patterns of the wildlife and sea mammals in the region. Because the game and sea mammals in the Arctic ecosystem are highly transient – take the mysterious annual migration of the caribou, for example – we Inuit have adopted a nomadic lifestyle for much of our history. Evalak from Hall Beach said it well:

*"The game never moved around in only one area. In some years the people occupy some parts of the land, and at other times they occupy another part of the land."<sup>15</sup>*

Although most Inuit in Chukotka, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland now live in settlements, the traditional knowledge still passed down from our elders to our children continues to reflect this nomadic tradition.

*"My father taught me how to make my gear by letting me make toys for myself that would eventually become real things as I grew older. The next step in my training as a hunter was when my father started to take me on actual trips by dog team. ... My father lectured me on how some day my livelihood would depend on hunting, as well as on other people. And he also told me that this was the one and only way to earn my living, and he told me to watch carefully and do as he did. I went to distant places by dog-team and boat. As I became older, I started making trips on my own, in the area where my father had taught me." Koveyook Natsiapik, Broughton Island, Nunavut.<sup>16</sup>*

Much of the traditional knowledge passed down from generation to generation is meant to hone the skills necessary for hunting and fishing. In order to hunt and fish safely and effectively in the Arctic, we train our

<sup>12</sup> Inuk is the singular of Inuit.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Hugh Brody, "Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions", In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 191.

<sup>14</sup> Ipiak, Quoted in Brody, "Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions", Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Brody, "Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions", Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 200.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 225.

young people to recognize different types of ice and to know the dangers associated with different seasons – for example, where the ice is likely to be thin at different times of year, or the signs that the edge of the ice might break off and leave a person stranded on an ice fracture that is rapidly drifting away. One traditional method for testing thin ice involves stabbing the ice two or three feet ahead with a stick with a piece of iron attached to the bottom of it. If the stick goes through the ice, this is a warning to backtrack and find another route, but if the ice feels solid, it is safe to gradually move forward. Inuit hunters spend much of their time out on the ice, mostly in small groups or even alone; therefore, reliable knowledge of the ice can be a matter of life and death.

---

### ***Reliable knowledge of the ice can be a matter of life and death***

---

Part of travelling on the ice, sometimes over long distances, is the ability to navigate based on landmarks that the untrained eye might not perceive and the untrained memory might not be capable of archiving over long time periods. The Inuit language for describing and naming places has made such travel possible for thousands of years. This quote from a Pelly Bay hunter is illustrative:

*“All the lakes where you can find fish or caribou have names. That is the only way we can travel. The one way we can recognize lakes is by their names. ... The names of places, of camps and of lakes are all important to us, for that is the way we travel – with names. ... Most of the names you come across when travelling are very old. Our ancestors named them because that is where they traveled.”*  
*Dominique Tunglik, Pelly Bay, Nunavut.*<sup>17</sup>

Out on the sea where there are fewer landmarks, and the features of the ice may change from year to year, traditional knowledge teaches hunters how to navigate using the sun, wind, and stars. A skilled navigator can use the ridges in the snow like a compass based on which direction the prevailing winds come from at that time of year. Additionally, he can use the location of the sun, or in the long Arctic nights, the stars, to deduce what direction he is travelling in. Another more widely-known navigation aid is the inukshuk, which acts as a marker for passers-by. In these ways and others, traditional knowledge enables us to travel over great distances without losing our way.

When a trip requires an overnight stay, or when a sudden storm or other setback leaves a traveller stranded on the ice, the traditional means of finding shelter is to build an igloo. Igloos are no longer used as seasonal shelter as they were in the recent past – several hunters interviewed for this report described growing up in igloos – but a seasoned hunter still knows how to build them and will do so if the situation requires it. Because igloos can be built quite quickly as shelter, they are an invaluable technology for the travelling Inuit, even today.

Also necessary for a long trip in the harsh Arctic climate is warm clothing. Inuit traditional knowledge passed down through the generations includes instruction on how to dry and stretch the skins of the animals harvested for food in order to make warm boots, pants, parkas, and mittens out of them. For example, caribou skins are often used for parkas, while sealskin is used for boots because it is waterproof when prepared correctly.

---

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Brody, “Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions”, Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 198.



---

***Movement will always be a necessary part of life in the Arctic. We do our best to prepare our young people for that reality***

---

All of this traditional knowledge, much of it at the very core of the Inuit way of life, has been developed and passed down in order to impart the knowledge of a nomadic people to its future generations. We Inuit recognize that movement will always be a necessary part of life in the Arctic and therefore do our best to prepare our young people for that reality.

### 3. Moving to Follow the Game

#### 3.1 Continued Importance of Traditional Diet

One thing that has remained most constant in Inuit life since the mid 1970s when Milton Freeman's team of researchers combed the area then called the Northwest Territories, and Carol Brice-Bennett's team studied the Labrador region, is the centrality of "country food" to the Inuit diet. As in the former days when meat, fish, and blubber were the dietary staples, augmented seasonally by berries and wildfowl eggs, Inuit today still rely heavily on foods obtained through hunting and gathering.

Interviews done by the land use and occupancy researchers in the mid 1970s evoked numerous responses stressing the importance of hunting and the traditional Inuit diet. A selection of statements is reproduced here:



*"I can't stand it (store-bought food). We were brought up living off the country, and we don't like to eat the food that you buy from the stores steady, you know. It's alright for two, three days; a week maybe." Charlie Gruben, Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvialuit Settlement Region.<sup>18</sup>*

*"We like our land, we like our natural foods. They give us the freedom to do what we want, the kind of life we like to live. Our culture we'll never forget. To keep our culture, we got to keep our land and have it free from being developed, so we'd kind of like to protect the land where we trap and hunt all our lives." Sam Raddi, Inuvik, Inuvialuit Settlement Region.<sup>19</sup>*

*"There are all kinds of animals... Inuit have been living here for a long time, and some people live only on game, and some have done so for many years. That is why we want to protect the land." Lucassie Inuktaluk, Sanikiluaq, Nunavut.<sup>20</sup>*

---

***"Our culture we'll never forget. To keep our culture, we got to keep our land and have it free from being developed"***

---

*Interviewer: Is it possible that people will gradually do less and less hunting? Young family man from Arctic Bay, Nunavut: No, I do not think so. Right now many people in Arctic Bay work in the white way, either here or in other places. But they still hunt. Look at me. I have a job here, but I go out*

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Brody, "Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions", Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 218.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 236.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 236.

*hunting. I was out yesterday. People here will always want real food, and for that reason alone we are all hunters. We'll always be hunters. ... For the young as well as for adults, to be an Inuk is inseparable from being in touch with the land and from the possession of the technical skills and moral qualities that make such contact both possible and valuable. All Inuit agree that the land is the mainstay of their life. Even in the most wage-oriented families, local foods are valued and sought above all others. And it is, of course, the young who must be relied upon to maintain the supply of local foods so that the people may continue to be Inuit.<sup>21</sup>*

---

***“We'll always be hunters. ... For the young as well as for adults, to be an Inuk is inseparable from being in touch with the land”***

---

*“I think and sometimes speak the thought that my children should eat well from the land. This is what I want to pass on to my descendants: good food from the land, caribou and fish. The land makes you live well and be healthy.” Rosia Paulla, Gjoa Haven, Nunavut.<sup>22</sup>*

Interviews conducted by ICC Canada in March 2008 indicate that despite the increased difficulty in finding and harvesting big game and sea mammals due to thinning and less predictable sea ice, Inuit communities are persistent in maintaining their traditional diets. When asked whether changes in ice conditions were affecting their traditional diets, respondents spoke of having to travel further or in a different month than usual; they spoke of dietary substitutions such as hunting more musk-oxen when the caribou migration shifted away from their area, or they explained how melting permafrost has made the natural ice cellars used to age and store meat less effective. Not one of them said anything to suggest they were giving up on hunting despite the considerable challenges some were facing in getting out on the ice and land.

---

***Not one of them said anything to suggest they were giving up on hunting despite the considerable challenges***

---

When asked how his life might change because of poorer ice conditions in the future, Tommy Qaqqasiq from Pangnirtung, Nunavut said:

*“Then we'll use other equipment. People will still hunt. It's part of our life. When things change, you just have to go with it.”<sup>23</sup>*

This sentiment was echoed by Frank Pokiak from Tuktoyaktuk in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, who said:

*“I'm still going to depend on harvesting, different species if it has to be. The majority of my food I still get from the land, I still depend on all the fish that we get and different ways to prepare it. Whale*

21 Quoted in Brody, “Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions”, Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 229.

22 Ibid. p. 241.

23 Interview on March 14, 2008.

*meat and seal meat, geese. You just change with the changes, I guess. I'll still be here. As long as I'm alive I'll keep doing what I'm doing.”<sup>24</sup>*

After describing in detail how climate change is forcing his community to deal with new challenges, John Keogak of Sachs Harbour shared this idea on how he can continue his harvesting practices:

*“A buddy of mine is into making little sleds out of aluminum, which you can use as a little kayak or boat. If you're out on the ice and you have to cross an open lead or something you can use that. It's one of the things that can help. I'm going to get one of those. It's combined as a little sleigh and, if you have to, you can use it as a boat. That's one way I can adapt.”<sup>25</sup>*

---

### ***We will do whatever it takes to keep eating our traditional food***

---

These responses illustrate that no matter how hard things get, we Inuit are not giving up on hunting. Even though climate change may prove to be the most difficult adaptation challenge we Inuit have ever faced, we will do whatever it takes to keep eating our traditional food.

## **3.2 Harvesting What the Land Provides**

Because we are determined to maintain our traditional diet – and in fact we need to eat harvested meat due to the high cost of store-bought meat, in addition to the cultural reasons for doing so – it follows that there will be continued reliance on hunting, or harvesting as it is commonly known. Since traditional Inuit foods are rarely sold in stores, they must be obtained by hunters who criss-cross the land and sea around their communities, regularly travelling hours and sometimes days to track down the wildlife and harvest what is needed for their families and communities.

This does not mean that all Inuit hunt – though most able-bodied men and some women do. And those who hunt often have other employment. For example, many hunters in the Canadian Inuit settlement regions have at least part-time or seasonal wage employment in addition to hunting.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, interview respondents lamented that high fuel costs to run snowmobiles have in some cases made it necessary to engage in wage employment in order to finance hunting expeditions. Along these lines, Inuit in northern Greenland have moved toward a division of labour in order to supply their communities with traditional country food. A substantial portion of the harvest is done by Inuit who are licenced professional hunters and sell their products to Inuit households in open-air markets.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the hunt continues. We Inuit keep on adapting to the new economic environment in ways that sustain our connection to the land and the harvest it provides.

---

<sup>24</sup> Interview on March 28, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Interview on March 13, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Poppel, Birger, Jack Kruse, Gérard Duhaime, Larissa Abryutina. 2007. SLICA Results. Anchorage: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage. p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Poppel et al., p. 4.

### 3.2.1 General Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Patterns

With few exceptions, Inuit settlements are located on sea coasts or on major waterways with easy access to the sea. This clearly reflects the importance of the sea to our Inuit way of life. Whether thickly frozen or open for the summer, the sea is our primary means of transportation. The usually ice-covered sea is our highway, the only physical connection between many of our communities and the only way we can access many of the animals we depend on for food.

---

***The usually ice-covered sea is our highway, the only physical connection between many of our communities and the only way we can access many of the animals we depend on for food***

---

The ability to move freely over long distances is foundational to hunting in the Arctic because the animals we hunt are constantly on the move.

*“Game always moves around. It is the way animals live... It has long been known that game have a way of searching for food, so they are always moving. Birds search for other birds. Sea animals search for food. So the seals are kept moving by other sea animals, searching for food. If sea animals did not search for food, maybe we would not have any seals!” Qayadjuak, Hall Beach, Nunavut.<sup>28</sup>*

*“[Jar seals] are moving around all the time. They don't stay in one area all of the time. You probably could see about 100 seals outside of Hopedale this week. Maybe there's no seal in Makkovik. Maybe about a couple of weeks after, someone gets a nice bunch of seals up in Makkovik. They would be some of the same flock of seals moving forth and back.”<sup>29</sup> George Lane, Hopedale, Nunatsiavut.*

*Like the hunters who know their way, polar bears depend on ice for their seasonal movements. Each year, beginning in midwinter and continuing into spring, bears move northward, following the shore ice and the floe edge. Because they also depend on killing seals on the sea ice, the location of bears is as variable as the ice conditions.<sup>30</sup>*

At the appropriate times each season, Inuit hunters set out to find these animals as their migrations bring them through their area. Some communities are lucky to have a favourable cove for whales, a feeding ground for caribou, or a nesting area for wild birds nearby. Others must travel further away to find these sources of food. Some communities live in places where the floe edge – the point at which the sea ice stops and the open water begins, and generally the best place to find sea mammals – is an hour away from shore. Others must travel three or four hours to reach it. As one might expect, these harvest conditions fluctuate from year to year, largely dependent on the weather. This is why we Inuit must be ready to travel long distances if necessary.

From time to time, disaster strikes and a community must completely alter its subsistence pattern in order to survive. For example, the community of Read Island near Kugluktuk in western Nunavut had

28 Quoted in Brody, “Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions”, In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 209.

29 Carol Brice-Bennett, ed., 1977. Our Footprints are Everywhere: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy in Labrador. Labrador Inuit Association. p. 149.

30 Brody, “Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions”, In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 214.

enjoyed excellent access to caribou herds that crossed the Dolphin and Union Strait to reach Victoria Island for the summer. Shortly after the rifle was introduced in the region, the caribou stopped crossing the strait. The caribou migration pattern changed and the community went from regular, easy access to caribou to having none at all in their vicinity. The Read Islanders adjusted by switching to a smaller caribou variety that could still be found reasonably nearby, by making longer journeys to the mainland to harvest caribou there, and by trading with neighbouring communities in order to obtain skins used to make clothing, boats, and so on.<sup>31</sup>

Another very difficult time was the year when an unseasonably late rain fell on Banks Island in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Rain fell late in October, forming a thick layer of ice that covered all the ground vegetation normally eaten by the musk-ox herd. More than 20,000 musk-oxen were wiped out, eliminating the main source of winter food for the community of Sachs Harbour. John Keogak described the event this way:

*“In 2004 we had a big die-off of musk-ox because of a late rainfall in October. After it had snowed, it rained for a whole day. That created a big thick layer of ice. We had musk-ox trying to leave the island and falling through the ice, some were dying of starvation. All of their food was under ice. That was a bad year.”<sup>32</sup>*

In a tough year it may be possible to mitigate the lack of large game or whales by taking more geese or ducks, ptarmigans, fish, or other small game available in the region. In general, however, unexpected difficulties in the hunt for big game mean hunters must search further and further away until they manage to find enough big game or sea mammals to sustain the community until the next hunting season. This was the case in Kangiqsujuaq, Nunavik recently:

*“This past year we had a really hard time finding caribou. We travelled all over and didn't find any. We ended up going over to the island, which we never do, but finally there we managed to catch a caribou. It was really affecting our community already.” Pitseolak Panguartuq.<sup>33</sup>*

In this example, the community of Kangiqsujuaq was spared the hardship of being completely without caribou for the winter because the hunters were able to cross the Hudson Strait from Nunavik to Nunavut.

### 3.2.2 Regional Variations in Land Use and Occupancy

Inuit from Chukotka all the way to Greenland share a common culture based on similar hunting, fishing and whaling patterns. There are certain variations by region because the communities have easier access to various species.

Detailed land use studies are available for Alaska, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Labrador. For Nunavik and Greenland there are studies that provide similar information but are less comprehensive. Unfortunately there is little information at all about land use in Chukotka.<sup>34</sup> What follows is a brief

31 Don R. Farquharson, “Inuit Land Use in the West-Central Arctic,” In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 33-36.

32 Interview on March 13, 2008.

33 Interview on March 15, 2008.

34 Note that the Sea Ice Knowledge and Use Project under the International Polar Year 2007/2008 is currently underway. Though SIKU is not a comprehensive land / ice use and occupancy study, it will combine Inuit-centred research from Chukotka, Alaska, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Greenland to present a wealth of information on the Inuit use and extensive traditional knowledge of sea ice.

summary of the variations in land use and occupancy in the Inuit settlement regions according to the available sources.

### *Alaska*

Residents of Alaska's North Slope Borough coastal communities travel throughout the Borough area in pursuit of subsistence activities. These include a fall whale hunt, in some cases a spring whale hunt, caribou and bird hunting throughout most of the year, as well as fishing. The use areas for coastal settlements extend 40 km or further from the coast, as the Inupiat-Inuit use a combination of traditional skin boats and motorized boats to harvest sea mammals. Snowmobiles are also used on the ice in the hunt for sea mammals.<sup>35</sup>

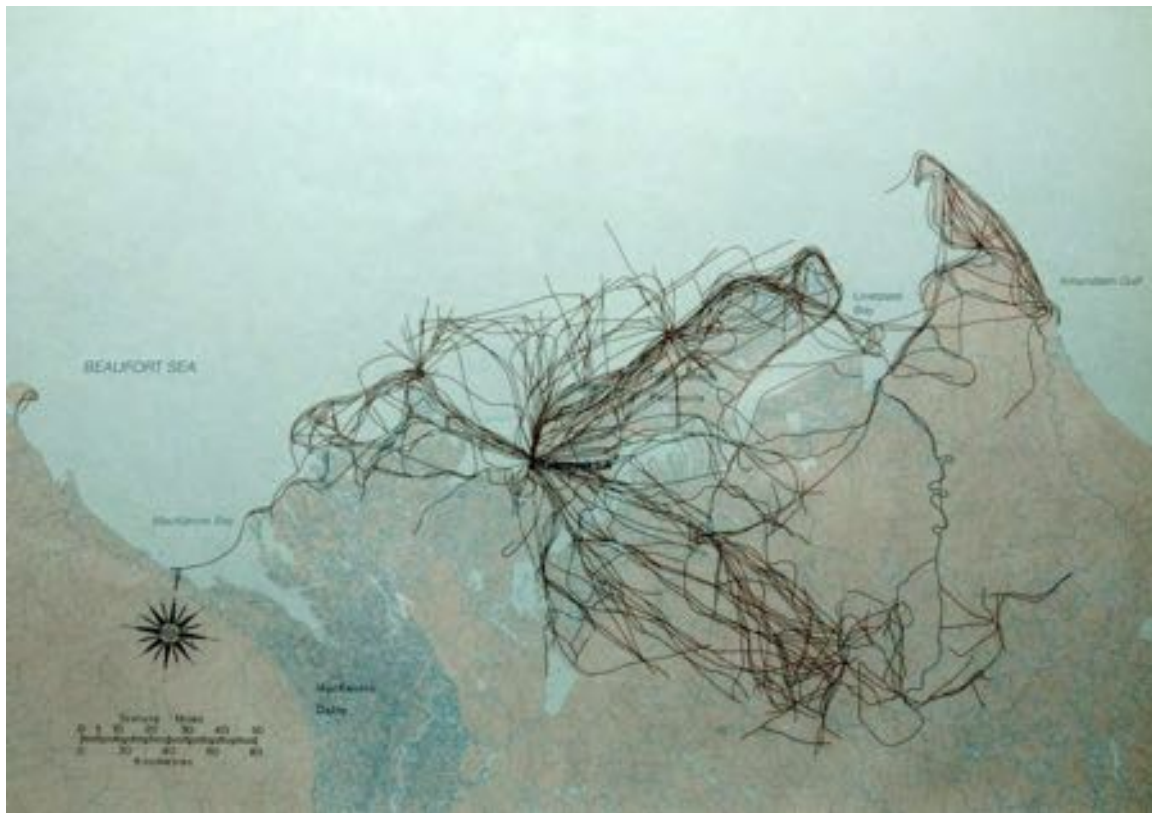


**Northwest Territories, Full Extent of Inuit Land Use.  
Source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.**

### *Inuvialuit Settlement Region*

The Inuvialuit Settlement Region includes the communities of Aklavik, Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, and Ulukhaktok (Holman Island). According to experienced hunters from Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, and Ulukhaktok, the area they cover in search of game is approximately the same now as it was at the time of the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project (ILUOP) – with two exceptions. First, difficult ice conditions prevent the hunters from going as far out onto the sea ice in the Amundsen Gulf, and second, trapping has declined somewhat due to changes in the local economy.

<sup>35</sup> North Slope Borough Comprehensive Plan – Background Report, Chapter 3, p. 69-70.



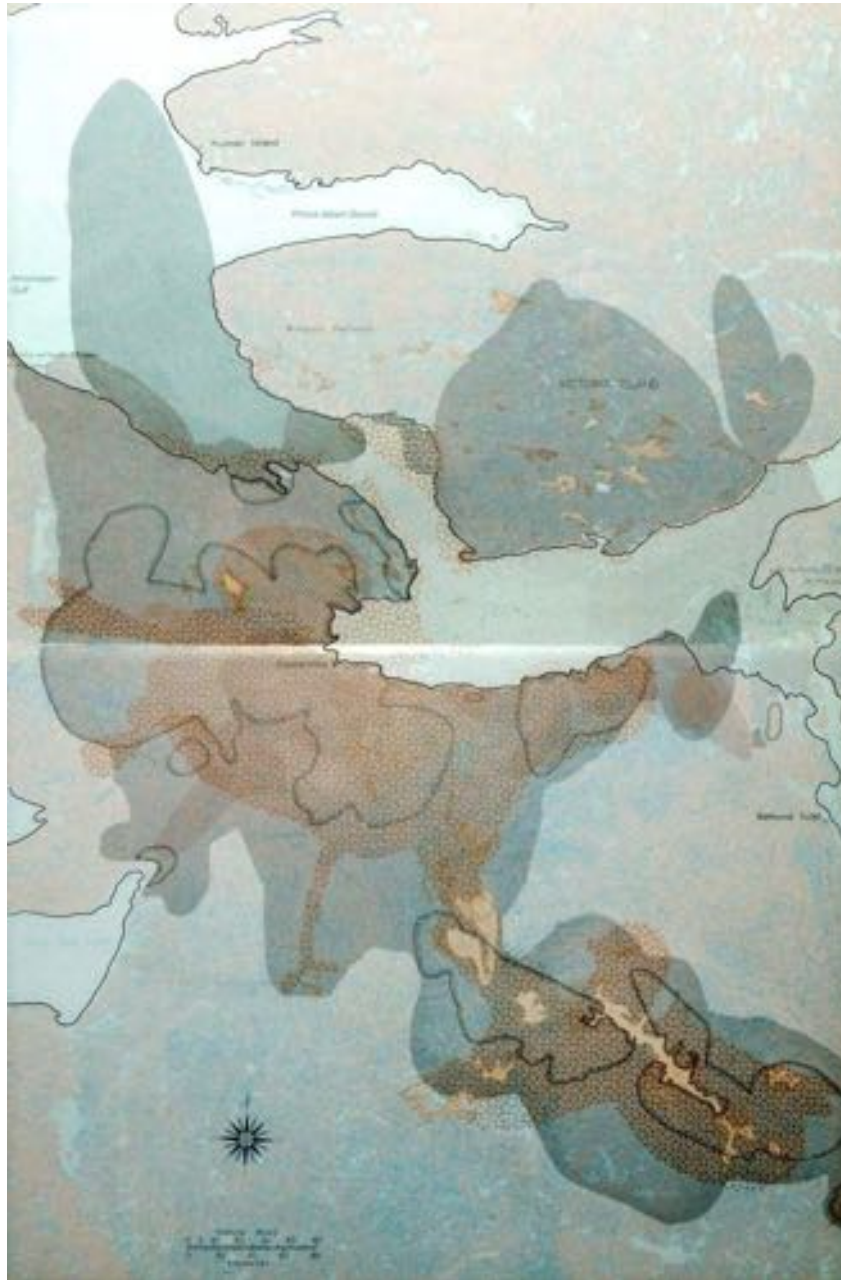
**Trapping Lines of Tuktoyaktuk, Inuvialuit Settlement Region, 1955-1974.  
Source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.**

The Inuvialuit Settlement Region communities engage in a full range of subsistence hunting, fishing, and whaling activities. On land they hunt caribou, musk-oxen, geese, and in some places moose. On the sea the western communities focus on whaling, while the eastern communities harvest more seals and polar bears. Fish are particularly abundant in Tuktoyaktuk, though all of the Inuvialuit communities engage in fishing.

### ***Nunavut***

Nunavut is a large territory, which is why it is commonly divided into three regions. Kitikmeot is the eastern-most region and includes the settlements of Kugluktuk (Coppermine), Bathurst Inlet, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven, Kugaaruk, Umingmaktok (Bay Chimo), and Taloyoak (Spence Bay). This area enjoys healthy populations of caribou, seals that are hunted year-round on the sea ice or in the open water, and rich nesting areas for ducks and geese. Many of the rivers and lakes contain char and trout, and cod can be found in some of the bays. Inuit in this region use the straits and gulfs between the mainland and the islands extensively for all kinds of hunting.





**Hunting Area of Kugluktuk (Coppermine), Nunavut, 1955-1974.  
Source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.**

Kivvaliq is the central region of Nunavut and includes the communities of Arviat, Whale Cove, Rankin Inlet, Baker Lake, Chesterfield Inlet, Coral Harbour, and Repulse Bay. Caribou are an important staple here in the fall and winter, while spring and early summer are the prime times to hunt for seals, walrus and white whales along the coast of Hudson Bay. As in other regions, fishing, hunting of ptarmigan and geese, and gathering of wildfowl eggs contribute to the traditional diet, as does harvesting of seafood.

The Baffin Region in the east consists of Baffin Island as well as the islands to the north and the smaller islands in Hudson Bay. This region includes the communities of Iqaluit, Kimmirut, Pangnirtung, Qikiqtarjuaq, Clyde River, Pond Inlet, Nanisivik, Arctic Bay, Igloodik, Hall Beach, and Cape Dorset, all the way up to Resolute and Grise Fiord, and down to Sanikiluaq. Ever since the time of the Thule ancestors, the region around the Hudson Strait and Foxe Basin has been an area with many Inuit communities because of the plentiful food resources found here. Many of the fiords, inlets and bays on the coast of Baffin Island are ideal for harvesting seals, polar bears, and narwhals. Caribou are also hunted extensively for food and to make clothing. In fact, the ideal time to hunt caribou for clothing on North Baffin Island is the summer, so the local term for the summer hunt means “the search for material for clothes.”<sup>36</sup>

### ***Nunavik***

The Nunavik settlement region in northern Quebec has fourteen villages. The principal village and administrative centre is Kuujuaq, on the southern shore of Ungava Bay; the other villages are Inukjuak, Salluit, Puvirnituq, Ivujivik, Kangiqsujuaq, Kangiqsualujuaq, Kangirsuk, Tasiujaq, Aupaluk, Akulivik, Quaqtaq, and Umiujaq.

While comprehensive land use studies are not available for this region, an interview with the president of the Nunavik Hunters and Trappers Organization revealed that white fox, wolves, otters, muskrat, and mink are trapped in the region, while seals, walrus, beluga whales, polar bears, sea ducks, and caribou are among the animals currently being hunted. He highlighted the fact that Inuit hunters have always been long distance travellers, and noted that hunters from his community of Puvirnituq travel hundreds of kilometres north by snowmobile or speed boat to hunt on the Hudson Strait near Baffin Island.<sup>37</sup> Another Inuit hunter added that they collect mussels and shrimp from under the sea ice.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Nunatsiavut***

The Labrador Inuit are the most recent to obtain a settlement agreement. The newly created Nunatsiavut settlement region includes the communities of Saglek, Hebron, Nutak, Nain, Hopedale, Postvale, Makkovik, and Rigolet. Like Inuit in other regions, these communities also harvest caribou, mostly in the winter; various species of seal; some walrus and polar bears; migratory birds in the fall; and large quantities of fish, including char and salmon.<sup>39</sup> Land hunting occurs throughout the settlement region, while extensive use is made of the sea ice and open water along the coast.

### ***Greenland***

The 18 municipalities in Greenland are, as in the other regions, located mainly on the coast in order to easily access the sea, but also due to the nearby Greenland ice cap. The municipalities, in turn, are made up of unincorporated towns, villages, and hunting settlements. Hunters travel by boat or over the ice by dog team to harvest several species of seal, hunt beluga whales and narwhal, and fish for capelin and other species of fish.<sup>40</sup> On land, Greenland Inuit hunt caribou (reindeer), musk-oxen, birds, and polar bears. Inuit in northern Greenland often travel as far as various islands near the Canadian border in search of sea mammals. Because of the warmer west Greenland current, much of South Greenland has ice free port access, whereas west and North Greenland have winter sea ice conditions.

36 Hugh Brody, “Inuit Land Use in North Baffin Island and Northern Foxe Basin,” *Freeman*, Vol. 1, p. 160.

37 Paulusie Novalinga, Interview on March 14, 2008.

38 Pitseolaq Pinguartuq, Interview on March 15, 2008.

39 Carol Brice-Bennett, ed. *Our Footprints are Everywhere*.

40 Sila Inuk. Interviews conducted in Disko Bay region, Greenland. July 9-10, 2007.



**Inuit Communities in Greenland**

Source: Greenland Home Rule Government

### 3.2.3 Necessity of Movement Over Land and Sea

These regional maps and descriptions of land and sea use show the vast territory covered by Inuit harvesters of sea mammals, fish, and game. As subsistence hunters, we Inuit follow the animals as far as needed in each season, according to the overall conditions of that particular year. While Inuit do use the sea ice for general transportation in addition to hunting, we are practical people who harvest as close to our communities as possible. The fact that we often travel long distances as part of the hunt means our people from Chukotka to Greenland need free movement over the land and sea in order to continue our subsistence-based way of life.

As climate change and reductions in sea ice affect the migration routes of the land and sea animals we rely upon, it may be necessary for us to travel even further than before in order to reach them. Inuit hunters are reporting many changes in the locations and times that our traditional animals can be found. In some communities this is reducing the territory that hunters need to cover, while in others they have to travel much further than before in order to harvest enough food for the communities. This is why we are very concerned that sea ice routes remain passable for hunters as well as the migratory game they follow, and that the entire Arctic environment be kept free from contamination – both in the areas we are now using regularly and in those areas where we may need to hunt in the future.

---

***As climate change and reductions in sea ice affect the migration routes of the land and sea animals we rely upon, it may be necessary for us to travel even further than before***

---

### 3.3 Recent Adaptations

Throughout our over 4000 year history, we Inuit have proven to be a highly adaptive people. We have learned new ways of travelling, adapted the construction of our snow houses to variations in climate, and adjusted our diet according to the availability of fish and wildlife. However, it is only in the past one hundred years or so that we have had ongoing contact with non-Inuit people, who we call *Qallunaat*. This contact has led to many changes for us, but we have worked hard to maintain our rich cultural heritage even as we adapt to the changes thrust at us.

---

*We have worked hard to maintain our rich cultural heritage even as we adapt to the changes thrust at us*

---

In our Alaskan and Canadian settlements, regular contact with the *Qallunaat* began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of fur trading centres in many of our communities. Many Inuit changed their hunting patterns during this time in order to capitalize on this opportunity to sell furs. Trapping became a more important activity, while sealing declined somewhat. Trappers also hunted more wolves and other predators in order to protect the foxes along the traplines.<sup>41</sup> In this way, we began to engage with the economic system of the *Qallunaat* while maintaining our connection to the land and the animals.

Around the same time, Inuit began using rifles for hunting. This was a major change that affected every type of hunting.

Also in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Inuit whalers switched from using the traditional skin boats to using schooners. In Alaska and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region this meant they no longer went as far inland to follow the caribou, choosing rather to stay near the coast in order to concentrate on whaling and fishing.<sup>42</sup>

In the late 1950s and 1960s, many Inuit began using snowmobiles instead of, or in addition to, dog teams.



This had a great effect on hunting. For example, caribou hunting became easier:

*“Wherever they are found, caribou are afraid of men and dogs. Hunters approached them by pretending to be another caribou, but a hunter had to make judicious use of terrain and wind to enter a herd and then to pick his kills. The snowmobile has changed that. Caribou are not so afraid of the noise of an engine, and they sometimes will approach a hunter on his snowmobile in apparent curiosity. With good rifles and snowmobiles, the caribou has become relatively easy quarry.”<sup>43</sup>*

41 Freeman makes frequent mention of these kinds of changes when the fur trade expanded in the Arctic.

42 Peter Usher, “Inuit Land Use in the Western Canadian Arctic,” In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 22.

43 Quoted in Brody, “Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions”, In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 208.

In recent years, hunters have begun using modern communication devices to stay in touch with other hunters or their families while out on longer hunting trips. In the interviews conducted in March 2008, most respondents said they used some kind of communication device. Some used two-way radios or mobile phones to stay in touch with home or other hunters. One mentioned looking up ice condition reports on the Internet. Several said they used a GPS device, with one describing a sophisticated system for reporting the location of all big game he took. Opinions on the usefulness of GPS varied, however:

*"I don't use the new gadgets much. Only when I'm going to an area known to be dangerous. But actually they can be dangerous too sometimes, because then you go by your compass or GPS when you should be going by your human senses. They are better in the summer on the water than out on the ice." James Kukkiq, Hall Beach, Nunavut.<sup>44</sup>*

*"I can either travel by the stars or use GPS, nowadays. They keep advancing. Now they have maps and charts that show how deep the water is. Navigation now is a lot easier than before." Paulusie Novalinga, Puvirnituaq, Nunavik.<sup>45</sup>*

*"I don't use GPS on the ice, knowing there might be open water anytime out there. I've noticed that people using GPS on the ice seem to get more into problems. The ice breaks up anytime here, so the trail you might have used breaks off sometimes. So I try and use what I've been taught out there and not rely on GPS." Loule Padluq, Kimmirut, Nunavut.<sup>46</sup>*

---

***While it is true that we live differently than we did one hundred, or even fifty years ago, at the core we are still the same***

---

With all of these changes, some people think we have lost part of our culture. While it is true that we live differently than we did one hundred, or even fifty years ago, at the core we are still the same. We may use fibreglass boats instead of skin boats and, in some areas, snowmobiles more often than dog teams. We may use rifles for much of our hunting instead of spears or wooden harpoons. We may even live in stationary settlements and spend less time in temporary camps. But we Inuit are still hunters and we still rely on the hunt for a large part of our diet, which means we are still out on the land and sea, still travelling great distances to seek out the animals whose behaviour we know so well.

---

44 Interview on March 14, 2008.

45 Interview on March 14, 2008.

46 Interview on March 14, 2008.

## 4. Inuit Sustainability

In recent times, many people in business and government and universities have begun to speak about “sustainability.” They speak about sustainable development, for example, which seems to mean different things to different people. There is also talk of economic sustainability and ecological sustainability. This is not a criticism of the people who promote these ideas, because it is certainly important to



think about the long-term consequences of our actions. The point is simply this – as a people who have lived in harmony with our ecosystem for thousands of years, we Inuit have a very different concept of sustainability. For us, an action that can continue for ten or twenty, or even fifty years before its damaging effects are seen does not qualify as sustainable. A way of doing things, a way of living and behaving, must be done in such a way that it could continue for hundreds and thousands of years without harming the natural way of things in order for it to meet the Inuit standard of sustainability.

---

***As a people who have lived in harmony with our ecosystem for thousands of years, we Inuit have a very different concept of sustainability***

---

The primary resource for Inuit is the animals. Our people have always known how to care for this resource. We live in harmony with the land. When we hunt, we only take what we need and make sure to leave enough of the herd so that it can replenish itself.

*“Caribou in the 1990s declined to a very low level, so on our own we put on a restriction of one caribou per household per year, just to preserve the caribou. We started changing over to musk-ox and now musk-ox is a very staple diet for our community.” John Keogak, Sachs Harbour, Inuvialuit Settlement Region.<sup>47</sup>*



<sup>47</sup> Interview on March 13, 2008.

*“Before game laws were laid down by the government, people used to hunt in places until the animals were no longer plentiful. Instead of hunting all the animals until there were none, they would move elsewhere, to where the animals were more abundant, so that the animals they left would multiply. I used to hunt musk-oxen on the Prince of Wales Island until there were not many animals left. The musk-oxen there were no longer plentiful. Instead of staying to hunt all of the musk-oxen, we moved to another area around Pelly Bay, where we then hunted musk-oxen again.” Constant Sallarina, Spence Bay, Nunavut.<sup>48</sup>*

*“I think of the time we used to go out camping in spring. I still know where the seals are. Even though I'm sitting right here, I'm thinking of how we used to go out after seals in spring. We used to go where the seals would mostly be found. We used to take many seals. We never wasted any. We used the skin for making boots or for making a bag in which we could put seal blubber for the next winter. We used to eat the meat and give a part of it for our dogs. We would never waste any. When we got many seals, we would save some for the next winter, for dog food and for ourselves. We would use seal skins for making a tent and storing food when we travelled. Seal skins were looked after well by our wives because the skins were so useful. We used them in summer, winter, fall and spring. In summer, we used seal skins for boots and kayaks because they are waterproof. We even used them to make harnesses for our dogs.” Dominique Tungilik, Pelly Bay, Nunavut.<sup>49</sup>*

---

***We live in the Arctic. This is our home. This is where our people have lived for thousands of years and we intend to live here for thousands more.***

---

When thinking about sustainability, it is important to understand that we Inuit live in the Arctic. This is our home. This is where our people have lived for thousands of years and we intend to live here for thousands more. When we talk about the future, we are not talking about a five-year plan or even a ten-year plan. We are talking about our children and our children's children. We are talking about living in the same communities where we can see the evidence of our ancestors. We are talking about preserving our way of life and the natural environment it depends upon for hundreds and thousands of years. This is what Inuit call sustainability.

## **4.1 Sustainability, the Local Economy, and Shipping**

Inuit are practical people. We know that it is not possible to turn back the clock on changes, so we do our best to adapt. For example, many of our people work in wage employment at the same time as they live off the land. This means we need jobs, and we need them in our communities so that our young people do not need to move down south and our men and women are able to live with their families.

At the same time, we Inuit are very concerned about the effect that various activities associated with “economic development” are having on our land. As this report has described, we travel all over our land and so do the animals we eat. When any kind of disruption in the natural order of things occurs – for example, an oil spill, dumping of waste, or noise from machinery or ships – the animals are affected. This automatically affects our health and well-being as well, because we are left with a choice between two

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Brody, “Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions”, In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 200.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

bad options: Stop hunting the animals which supply us with our meat, which would be a terrible tragedy for our culture and leave our communities without an affordable source of protein. Or, continue to hunt and eat our traditional foods, with negative consequences for our health.

---

### ***We travel all over our land and so do the animals we eat***

---

The following quotes illustrate some of the problems associated with economic activities that do not meet the Inuit standard of sustainability:

*"I am going to tell you a story about a trip I made once to the Alert area, near Eureka, in 1961. That area, more to our side of the community, had neither caribou nor polar bear tracks. Even behind Eureka, as well as overland, there were not even Arctic hares, not a single sign of foxes. It had no evidence of animal life at all. Obviously Qallunaat had been living there. I am telling you of this event because I have some remembrance of it. But some time ago, that area, even on the sea ice between Grise Fiord and Eureka, used to have caribou and polar bear tracks. Naturally, because the animals had not been forced to go somewhere else. I have thought a lot about this." Akeegok, Grise Fiord, Nunavut.<sup>50</sup>*

*"In our area even the meat itself has changed. For the past ten years or so, I get stomach problems, horrible cramps, when I eat seals and seafood. There is lots of sewage, garbage, and mining waste draining into the sea near Rankin Inlet, so eating the animals is giving us problems now. I know this is specific to our area, because when I went to Igloolik, I could still enjoy the traditional delicacies. I can't enjoy them here anymore because of the terrible side-effects." Lizzie Ittinuar, Rankin Inlet, Nunavut.<sup>51</sup>*

*"I think what done it [caused the seals to disappear] in this bay up here, [an oil company] used to have a lot of oil up there, you know. Up in Makkovik Bay, here. They used to have it up on the beach every summer, for the last nine or ten years – I suppose more than that. Some of the drums be leaky, and there be like oil over the water in the spring. You wouldn't see a seal up in the bay now. You wouldn't get one up there to save your soul." Bert Winters, Makkovik, Nunatsiavut.<sup>52</sup>*

Ships coming through our seas are also a cause for concern. On the one hand, they can be used to supply our communities with building materials and goods for our stores, which might bring a welcome reduction in the high cost of living in the Arctic. However, ships have also caused a lot of damage, as these hunters explain:

*"In recent years, all kinds of cruise ships are coming in to our area. Last year alone, there were maybe five or six cruise ships that came into town. More are coming every year. There's a national park here in Pangnirtung, further inside the fiord, that's what they are coming to see. The tourists come into town and buy all kinds of art, like carvings, craft work, soapstone, whatever they can afford to buy. They help the artists. But hunters have been complaining about those ships because they go all over Cumberland Sound, even to the campsites. People are saying they are scaring away the animals, the mammals and whales. We are really noticing this because in the past couple of summers we hardly*

---

50 Quoted in Brody, "Land Occupancy: Inuit Perceptions", In Freeman, Vol. 1, p. 233.

51 Interview on March 15, 2008.

52 Quoted in Carol Brice-Bennett, ed. Our Footprints are Everywhere. p. 258.



saw any narwhals around. Usually we catch our quota, but not in these past years.” Tommy Qaqqasiq, Pangnirtung, Nunavut.<sup>53</sup>

“A few years ago there were 28 whale hunters who went out to go hunting. I love to take pictures, so I was filming our trip the whole way with my video camera. We ended up getting three whales, but because of the ice conditions that the ships left, there was almost like a disaster. We lost skidoos and equipment [when they fell through the ice]. Because I was taping the whole thing, I was a witness and we got compensated for the skidoos and hunting equipment we lost. The people who came in the helicopters asked for my tape, which they used to give us skidoos. They were smart enough to realize that they had wrecked the area with their ships and it was their fault, so they ended up compensating us for what we had lost.” Tommy Tatateapik, Arctic Bay, Nunavut.<sup>54</sup>

“In one way [ships are] good for us. We need material, we need housing, we need goods, of course. But in another way, when it comes to hunting and fishing, there are less animals that come around our shores if there's a big boat off-loading, with its big lights and so on. That scares off some of the marine mammals that do come here. Therefore it affects the hunting when there's a big boat anchored in the middle of the bay.” Paulusie Novalinga, Puvirnituq, Nunavik.<sup>55</sup>

Another example of the difficulties related to shipping comes from the community of Tuktoyaktuk on the Beaufort Sea coast. Tuktoyaktuk has long been a key hub for supply ships servicing many of the Inuit communities in Canada. Because the harbour is also teeming with various species of fish, Tuktoyaktuk is an instructive example of colliding interests between economic activities and Inuit use of the sea. Inuit hunter, trapper, and fisherman Chucky Gruben describes the issues:

“We have a hunters and trappers committee here, we take care of the wildlife. We deal with the people, we deal with the shipping companies. We have done some things where after freeze-up, the ships are not allowed to come into the harbour. But this past year, because of late shipping to other communities, we had to keep our harbour open longer than usual because the supplies hadn't gone out to the other communities.

The community of Tuktoyaktuk is right in a harbour where a lot of fishing takes place. There's two entrances to the Tuk harbour. What we call the west entrance is where the smaller boats come in, and over by the east entrance is where the larger ships come in. The east entrance is a place where a lot of people here that do their fishing set their nets right in the channel. Because the ships had made a ship track through the east entrance, they kept it open up right until November sometime, and the people couldn't set their nets there because of the ships going back and forth. That is one of the impacts of shipping on our harvest.

Usually with that kind of thing, we do have a say on whether the ships can use the area, but times are changing and every year we get applications to come into the harbour later and later. They wanted to do that the year before last, too, but we had to say no. Last fall we didn't really have a choice because there was still fuel and a lot of supplies that needed to go out to the other communities, so we had no choice.”<sup>56</sup>

53 Interview on March 14, 2008.

54 Interview on March 14, 2008.

55 Interview on March 14, 2008.

56 Interview on March 31, 2008.

---

***Any activity in the Arctic, whether it is resource extraction, tourism, or military-related, must be undertaken according to the Inuit definition of sustainability – it must support the continuation of the Inuit way of life for thousands of years to come.***

---

The point we wish to emphasize through these accounts from various Inuit communities is that the environment is vital to our entire way of life as Inuit. If something were to happen to our fragile Arctic ecosystem, our way of life would be lost and we as a people would be lost. Therefore, any activity in the Arctic, whether it is resource extraction, tourism, or military-related, must be undertaken according to the Inuit definition of sustainability – it must support the continuation of the Inuit way of life for thousands of years to come.

---

## 5. Conclusion

In the Arctic, the sea ice is our highway in wintertime and the open sea is our highway in summertime. The sea is integral to our way of life as Inuit. Because we still rely on traditional Inuit food for a large portion of our diet, and because hunting and being out on the land are central to our culture, we continue to use the land and sea the same way our ancestors have done for thousands of years. This gives us a great sense of pride and well-being.



---

***In the Arctic, the sea ice is our highway in wintertime and the open sea is our highway in summertime. The sea is integral to our way of life as Inuit.***

---

In the face of climate change and the potential for greater use of the Arctic by newcomers, we urge anyone making any plans regarding our land and sea to remember who has been living in the Arctic for thousands of years, and who will continue to live here for thousands more.







