

**The Ocean Sustains Us – an Inuit Perspective**  
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High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy  
Royal Canadian Geographical Society  
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Inuit are a marine people. Most of our communities are located on the coast or beside main waterways that allow for direct and easy access to the sea. The Arctic marine environment is what nourishes our body, mind, and soul – it is our food security. It is what keeps us strong and has sustained us for thousands of years.

The Arctic Ocean defines our people and our culture. We move over its surface whether it is liquid or frozen solid. It is central to our cultural identity and economic and social well-being. It is irreplaceable to us.

And while we are from different parts of the planet and live in very different climates, we share a relationship to the ocean with the people of Palau, Maldives and people other small island states.

ICC is pleased to participate in this session and we look forward to contributing to the content of the reports and recommendations the High Level Panel will produce. We note that the panel's approach to a sustainable ocean economy focuses on "the protection of, production from and investment in the ocean" and in this way "the Panel will chart a path to a sustainable ocean economy."

The long-term health and productivity of the ocean is key to our survival as a distinct people with rights to land and resources as defined through land claims in Canada and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As rights holders, Inuit have developed a well-established system of governance and the Inuit Circumpolar Council is part of this. ICC represents the rights and voices of the 160,000 Inuit living in Inuit Nunaat, the circumpolar Inuit homeland of Canada, Alaska, Chukotka and Greenland. One people, one voice, four countries.

For over 40 years, ICC has been a strong voice for Inuit rights. ICC is a well-respected Permanent Participant at the Arctic Council and we actively use our United Nations Consultative Status.

Inuit face many challenges across the circumpolar world. One need only look at the first six 2030 Sustainable Development Goals to identify the most pressing needs for Inuit: poverty, hunger, health and wellness, education, gender and clean water. Climate change and transboundary pollutants amplify these challenges and no part of our homeland is immune.

The Sustainable Development Goals were very much in the minds of the delegates at the last ICC General Assembly who developed the Utqiaġvik Declaration and its more than 50 action items. Food security is an essential feature of the declaration which will guide ICC's work until 2022. For Inuit, a sustainable ocean economy is key to ensuring food security.

We are at a crossroads and the decisions we make will shape the future of the Arctic marine environment and its peoples. Shipping, commercial fisheries, oil and gas exploration, and tourism must all be considered when talking about a sustainable ocean economy in the Arctic.

In 2017, ICC held the Circumpolar Inuit Economic Summit to explore potential collaborations among Inuit businesses and facilitate Inuit businesses sharing experiences amongst themselves. The summit declaration identified the need to establish an International Inuit Business Council to foster cooperation that benefits Inuit at the local, national and international level. The High Level Panel's direction aligns with the thinking behind this summit.

Economic development can mean many different things to different Arctic countries, different Arctic regions and even different communities within Inuit regions. But one thing is certain -- economic development done right means equity. It means long-term sustainability for our communities, futures for our youth, the opportunity to break the cycles of poverty that plague our communities. It means that economic development is not simply done **for** the peoples of the Arctic, it is also done **by** the peoples of the Arctic.

We must pursue economic development that considers social equity to be as important, if not more important, than stock value. We must create economic development opportunities that build cultural sustainability and community wellness rather than compete with these, which has too often been the reality.

Why? Because, as the High Level Panel's literature says, "the ocean is a source of life." Inuit know this perhaps better than most people around the world. We see the work of the High Level Panel and our contribution to it as part of an effort to chart a course to attain self-determination through economic development that understands and addresses the social, cultural and environmental challenges and opportunities in Inuit Nunaat. Solutions found in a sustainably managed marine environment can address immediate societal challenges such as food insecurity, social development and climate change, among others if they are approached through a new lens – led by Inuit and in partnership with Inuit.

I would like to offer an example of how Inuit have addressed what we call the "Ice-Blue Economy" and the future of the marine region through innovative stewardship planning. In November 2017, ICC released the Pikialasorsuaq Commission report. This report proposes a vision for the future of the marine region between Canada and Greenland and referred to as the Great Northwater Polynya. The Commission developed three recommendations from listening to all the communities that use the Pikialasorsuaq:

- 1) Inuit need increased mobility across the international border that runs through the Pikialasorsuaq;
- 2) An Inuit Management Authority should be created; and
- 3) An Inuit led monitoring regime should be established.

This unique and highly sensitive marine region is central to the biological integrity of the central Arctic ecosystem and the cultural integrity of Inuit in both Canada and Greenland and Inuit wish to be the stewards of it. Discussions are now underway on how to make Inuit management in the Pikialasorsuaq a reality.

One final point which is relevant to the panel's Arctic work must be emphasized. The management of the Pikialasorsuaq will be grounded in Indigenous Knowledge. It is our knowledge about the Arctic marine environment – rigorous and tested over centuries of experience – that we bring to the table. ICC welcomes the opportunity to assist the panel in ensuring its work is informed by the Indigenous Knowledge of the Arctic marine environment.