



Inuit knowledge in action - three stories of Inuit marine management as a key to climate adaption
Blue Zone, Cryosphere Pavilion
November 3, 2021, 1000 – 1130 hrs

The Inuit Circumpolar Council will present three elements of a story that shows how Inuit involvement and governance over the marine environment are essential for us in order to adapt to climate-driven change reshaping our homelands and societies. The stories will reveal Inuit perspectives from the local community level, to the regional level, to the global level. We will use technology to bring in other voices, and to show some of the places discussed.

As the Presidency program notes, “International commitments around adaptation and resilience should deliver action which spans beyond COP 26 and provides long-term security to those that suffer the greatest consequences from climate change.” With warming occurring at twice the global rate throughout our homelands -- the Arctic, and with the ongoing collapse of summer sea ice, there is no doubt that Inuit are seeing the greatest consequences from climate change.

For thousands of years, we have been part of the Arctic ecosystem. Inuit culture and values are shaped by it. In keeping with the traditions of a people who have thrived in some of the most extreme conditions on earth, we are not sitting back, but are working to ensure our continued well-being and cultural integrity. Our most important tool in this work is our intimate connection and knowledge of our environment and the behaviours of the wildlife inhabiting that environment. This knowledge is the result of thousands of years of direct experience within the Arctic marine landscape and with it the creation of the foundation of our culture. Without it, we would not have survived as a people. Without it, we will have difficulty navigating our way through the wrenching environmental change we are experiencing.

The Arctic marine environment is central to Inuit food security. Whether on the sea ice or in the water, a substantial part of our diet originates here. We are already experiencing physical and social stresses due to food insecurity. A survey of Canadian Inuit found that more than half of those over 25 had experienced food insecurity in the preceding 12 months.

Food insecurity is being exacerbated by climate change. This is due in part to changes in wildlife. Animal migration times and routes are changing. The migration of caribou across sea ice is at risk. The health of animals is changing. Seabird breeding success in some places has plummeted because of changes in the availability of their prey fish. New species are showing up in increasing numbers. Killer whales going further into the Arctic and staying longer, preying on animals that are important food for Inuit. The changing climate affects Inuit access to traditional foods. Weaker sea ice and more frequent storms create hazardous conditions for hunting and fishing.

In these conditions, Inuit knowledge is essential to help our people to adapt. But the knowledge by itself is not enough; we also need the ability to put it into practice. As noted in an ICC publication, “We are lacking in our ability to make daily adaptive decisions due to policies, regulations and other intervening factors.” An essential aspect of Inuit adaptation and resilience is a role in the management and governance of the marine areas surrounding our communities. Because of the linkages between these adjacent areas and larger systems, the Inuit role in marine management and governance ranging from the local to the global is more and more important.



We intend to demonstrate this through three stories that take us from the local to the global. The first story is the story of a community in the Canadian Arctic that is undertaking a project to exercise local authority over food sources and our food systems. This is where much meaningful work takes place, at the local level. The ability of Inuit to exercise their authority locally varies throughout Inuit Nunaat (lands where Inuit live). The second story is one of a regional asset critical to Inuit food security and adaptation in two countries; the Sarvajuaq/Pikialasorsuaq. This is the largest polynya in the northern hemisphere and provides essential winter habitat for wildlife. ICC has promoted a bilateral framework for Inuit management and governance of this linchpin of regional productivity. The third story speaks of the broader international marine agreements and conventions that affect Inuit communities but do not hear from our communities. For instance, Inuit are pushing for a voice at the International Maritime Organization. The disappearance of summer sea ice is drastically changing the quantity and type of shipping in waters Inuit need and use.

This presentation will be of interest to anybody who wonders what is required for successful climate adaptation for Indigenous peoples. In many cases, it is not the intervention of well-meaning outsiders, but the ability of the peoples themselves to have a meaningful say in how their lands and waters are managed. This is something that can be supported at little cost by governments at a local level, a regional level, and an international level. As the presidency says, “International commitments around adaptation and resilience should deliver action which spans beyond COP 26.” Inuit have been working and will continue to work on these marine management and governance issues beyond COP 26. We want governments both within and outside our region to understand that there is a direct linkage between these governance and management issues, and our ability to adapt to, and be resilient to climate change.

Moderator: Dalee Sambo Dorough - Inuit Circumpolar International Chair and Head of Delegation (Alaska)

Panelists:

- Jimmy Oleekatalik - Manager, Spence Bay Hunters and Trappers Association, Taloyoak, Nunavut (Canada)
- Lisa Koperqualuk – Vice President (International), Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada)