



Northern Waters Task Force (December 2010)

By Jim Stotts, ICC Alaska President

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Northern Waters Task Force (NWTF). Thank you for making the effort to visit Barrow which is on the front line for resource development in the US portion of the Arctic Ocean.

My name is Jim Stotts and I'm President of the Alaska chapter of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). Our membership includes Inuit from the North Slope, Northwest, Bering Straits and Southwest Delta regions of the state. Internationally, the ICC represents 160,000 Inuit from the United States, Canada, Greenland and Russia.

As a recognized non-governmental organization with consultative status to the United Nations, and a permanent participant to the Arctic Council, ICC is very much aware of activities going on in the Arctic at both the national and international level.

ICC's purpose is: to strengthen unity among Inuit of the Arctic; to promote Inuit rights and interests at the international level; to develop and encourage long term policies that protect the Arctic environment; and seek full and active partnership in the political, economic, and social development of the Arctic.

In other words, ICC pushes for Inuit influence over all activities affecting them and their homeland, on land, air and sea. This has been ICC's mission for 30 years. It's fitting to note that the ICC started right here in Barrow, through the vision of Eben Hopson Sr, the first Mayor of the North Slope Borough.

The NWTF is just starting its work and this is only its second hearing. So, timing is perfect to get things started out right, to ensure that the task force develops a balanced perspective moving forward. In ICC's opinion, the State of Alaska needs a more balanced perspective when it comes to development in northern waters and the Arctic Ocean.

We believe the State's approach is too favorable on the side of development. In other words, resource development trumps all other considerations, including cultural, social and environmental considerations. We hope the task force will be able to get beyond this lop-sided approach and come up with some ideas that the Inupiat can get behind. Without a balanced focus this could end up being a wasted effort.

Sadly there is no representation from tribal organizations on the task force. The task force would benefit greatly from a tribal presence. The Arctic Council, the inter-governmental organization of the eight Arctic nations, charged with developing Arctic policy, has indigenous people's organizations as permanent participants. The newly formed US National Ocean Council also calls for a tribal presence. The State of Alaska should consider doing the same. This would give the State greater credibility and acceptance with the Inupiat which is sorely needed at this time.

In HCR-22 which establishes the NWTF, the duties of the task force are spelled out as: 1) assess and facilitate the creation of a joint state and federal commission to oversee development of state and federal northern ocean waters; 2) facilitate regional coordination, cooperation, and outreach regarding creation of the commission to keep local stakeholders informed and incorporate their input into the process; 3) identify and coordinate mutual concerns of federal, state, and local agencies, and international interests in the creation of the commission. These are the three duties of the task force.

The task force shall carry out these duties by holding hearings in the northern region of the State, providing recommendations regarding the creation of the joint commission, and delivering reports to the legislature with legislative proposals for consideration in January 2012. In a nutshell this is the mandate of the NWTF.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that the State of Alaska missed an excellent opportunity to address one of the most important concerns raised by local authorities when the State failed to act, last legislative session, to strengthen Coastal Zone Management. Local influence was, in effect, rubbed out. In our opinion, the State decided to follow industry's lead and made the wrong decision, again.

From ICCs perspective it appears the State doesn't trust local people and has decided that it will make the decisions that affect them on their behalf. It's no wonder the Inupiat are losing trust in the State to help them with their problems and concerns. This task force will have to wrestle with this local perception as it moves ahead trying to develop recommendations that Inupiat can support. Again, a balanced approach is necessary.

Cultural, social and environmental issues must be considered at the same time as economic and resource development issues.

A few words about the Arctic Council, the Council has been and continues to be involved in developing Arctic policy in many areas, including areas that directly impact Arctic indigenous peoples. For example, on February 16th, there will be a meeting of the Health Ministers from the eight Arctic nations in Nuuk, Greenland. The Alaska State Commissioner of Health and Social Services will be invited to this meeting based on ICC Alaska's recommendation that he be invited. ICC Alaska knows the State will accept the invitation in the spirit in which it's made. We hope this will lead to mutual cooperation on the many health issues facing the Arctic. At least, it's a chance.

I mention this is to illustrate that Inupiat are and have been involved for many years in the process of helping create Arctic policy at the national and international level. Policies that protect the environment while allowing for sustainable development. Our understanding of sustainability includes the notion of cultural sustainability. We are fighting to keep our culture alive in this modern world. We will not back down. Some of you realize this already.

The United States and its Arctic Council partners are addressing important matters facing the Arctic. Offshore oil and gas and other Arctic Ocean developments, such as Arctic marine shipping, are just two of the topics being discussed. Other matters such as environmental protection, biological diversity, and climate change are also on the front burner.

The Arctic Council discusses many other topics that ICC chooses to call the "Human Dimension". The human dimension includes topics of great concern to the Arctic's indigenous peoples and residents at the community level, including: education, health, language and culture, community energy and infrastructure needs, pollution and toxic contamination, scientific research and traditional knowledge, just to name some of the issues being discussed.

I suggest the NWTF needs to be informed on the workings of the Arctic Council, including the perspectives of its permanent participants. The Council has already done much great work on the issues before this task force. It appears development of the Arctic Ocean will take a cooperative international approach rather than each Arctic nation going its own way. This means the State of Alaska will have to cooperate within this larger framework or get left behind or left out of the discussion. Please don't take this as a threat, it's simply my observation. This process is pretty far down the track already.

Early indications are that the US National Oceans Council will take a similar holistic approach to development as well. The task force probably should keep this in mind and keep itself informed on what's going on at the National Oceans Council. Again, we think this is good advice.

Okay, now for some specific recommendations:

- 1) Include a tribal presence on the task force**
- 2) Put strong local influence back into Coastal Zone Management**
- 3) Realize Arctic offshore development is international in nature**
- 4) Science and traditional knowledge should form the basis for decisions**
- 5) Focus on offshore development must be holistic, not lopsided**
- 6) Inupiat must benefit from development, beyond jobs**
- 7) Seriously consider the NSB's offshore oil and gas policy (eight points)**
- 8) Expand the task force mandate to review the environmental side of Arctic Ocean resource development**

In closing, I want to mention that the ICC is facilitating and hosting an Inuit Leader's Summit on Resource Development February 23-24 in Ottawa, Canada. The three topics of discussion are: offshore oil and gas development, uranium mining, and the social and environmental impact assessment process.

This Summit will bring together Inuit leaders from our four countries to discuss these important topics. The State of Alaska Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources will be invited to the Summit to listen to what Inuit are thinking. This will be a great opportunity for networking. We hope the State will be able to attend.

Thank you for your time and good luck as you move forward. If ICC can be of help in the future please just let us know. I will be forwarding a copy of the Inuit Arctic Policy to Representative Joule for the task force's consideration. We call it the bible. If you have any questions, I'll be happy to try to answer them at this time.