



An Inuit Vision for the Future of the Pikialasorsuaq

Copenhagen, Denmark; Nuuk, Greenland; Iqaluit, Nunavut; Nov. 23, 2017

The Inuit Circumpolar Council's Pikialasorsuaq Commission is calling for the creation of an Inuit-identified, Inuit-managed protected area in the ecologically and culturally significant area shared by Canada and Greenland in the High Arctic, as well as reinstatement of free movement for Inuit between historically connected communities in both countries.

Pikialasorsuaq is the West Greenlandic name for the North Water polynya – an area of historically open water teeming with marine life that depend on the upwelling of nutrients caused by ocean and wind currents in that location. The Commission is led by Inuit from Greenland and Canada, and in its first major report, "People of the Ice Bridge: The Future of Pikialasorsuaq" <http://pikialasorsuaq.org> made the following recommendations for the conservation and management of the region:

- Establish a **management regime led by Inuit representatives** from communities in the Pikialasorsuaq region.
- In consultation with communities adjacent to the Pikialasorsuaq, **identify a protected area comprised of the polynya itself and a larger management zone** that reflects the connection between communities, their natural resources and the polynya. These areas would be monitored and managed by Inuit in agreement with all parties and formally recognized by governments.
- **Establish a free travel zone** for Inuit across the Pikialasorsuaq region.

"The ICC Pikialasorsuaq Commission process started in the communities and this is their report. The Pikialasorsuaq Commission process has been developed from the bottom up and it is clear Inuit of the Pikialasorsuaq want to lead the management of this area," says Okalik Egeesiak, chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council.

"Greenland and Canada share an Arctic treasure. We heard loud and clear from citizens in communities that are connected with Pikialasorsuaq that they want steps to be taken to protect it for future generations. People from the communities adjacent to Pikialasorsuaq want to be involved in the management and monitoring of this unique ecosystem. They recognize that the health of the species upon which they depend is connected to the health of the Pikialasorsuaq," says Kuupik V. Kleist, the Greenlandic commissioner and former premier of Greenland.



The Commission is seeking support from governments to implement the recommendations in the report. “It will take all levels of governments to realize this most important step in Inuit self-determination and management of their lands and waters. The Commission and the ICC urge the governments of Canada, Greenland and Denmark to work with Inuit and create a positive future for the Pikialasorsuaq and its peoples,” says Eva Aariak, Canadian commissioner, and former premier of Nunavut.

About the Pikialasorsuaq

Pikialasorsuaq, or “Great Upwelling,” is the largest Arctic polynya and the most biologically productive region north of the Arctic Circle. Pikialasorsuaq has been recognized by Inuit for generations as critical habitat, and communities in the Qikiqtani and Avangersuaq regions continue to rely on the polynya’s biological productivity.

Pikialasorsuaq is vital to many migratory species upon which these communities and others farther afield depend. Wildlife that rely on the North Water polynya include narwhals, belugas, Arctic char, little auks (alle alle), eiders, gulls, kittiwakes, seals, bearded seals, hooded seals and other mammals that polar bears depend on for food.

In recent years, the northern ice bridge in Kane Basin, Nares Straight and Smith Sound (Ikeq) has become less reliable and the polynya less defined. The consequences of these changes, linked to larger climatic shifts observable in many parts of the Arctic, are not known.

About the Commission

The Pikialasorsuaq Commission was mandated by the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) to conduct consultations in the communities in Nunavut and Greenland that are closely connected to Pikialasorsuaq.

It is led by three commissioners: International Commissioner Okalik Egeesiak (chair of the ICC), Canadian Commissioner Eva Aariak (former Premier of Nunavut) and Greenland Commissioner Kuupik Kleist (former Greenland Premier).

The commissioners undertook consultations designed to facilitate local and regional input, to incorporate Indigenous knowledge, and to recommend an Inuit strategy for safeguarding, monitoring and management of the health of Pikialasorsuaq for future generations.

Consultations took place with Canadian Inuit communities (Grise Fiord, Resolute, Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet and Clyde River) and in Northern Greenlandic communities (Siorapaluk, Qaanaaq, Savissivik, Kullorsuaq, Nuussuaq and Upernavik).



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This report was made possible through the support of the Oceans North, the World Wildlife Fund, Oak Foundation, and the Betty and Gordon Moore Foundation.