



## **Inuvialuit Game Council Focus Group Meeting Summary Report Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources<sup>1</sup>**



Photo: Chanda Turner; Not Pictured: John Lucas, Jr.

**Food Sovereignty** is the right of Inuit to define their own hunting, gathering, fishing, land and water policies; the right to define what is sustainable, socially, economically and culturally appropriate for the distribution of food and to maintain ecological health; the right to obtain and maintain practices that ensure access to tools needed to obtain, process, store and consume traditional foods. Within the Alaskan Inuit Food Security Conceptual Framework, food sovereignty is a necessity for supporting and maintaining the six dimensions of food security.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council – Alaska. 2015. Alaskan Inuit Food Security Conceptual Framework: How to Assess the Arctic From an Inuit Perspective. Technical Report. Anchorage, AK.

## **Citation**

This report reflects the knowledge and perspectives of Indigenous Knowledge holders attending the focus group meeting. The report should be cited as: Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska. 2018. Inuvialuit Game Council Focus Group: *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources*. Anchorage, Alaska.

The focus group meeting was facilitated by Carolina Behe and Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough. This report was prepared by Shannon Williams with support provided by Carolina Behe and Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough.

## **Quyanainni/Koana**

Thank you to Jennifer Lam and Chanda Turner of the Inuvialuit Game Council for providing logistical and meeting support. Quyanainni to Eileen Gruben for providing the delicious food. And Quyanainni to the Inuvialuit Game Council members for participating in the focus group, and for welcoming us to the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.



Photo: Carolina Behe

## **About the Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources (*FSSG project*)**

The FSSG project is a follow up to our 2015 report How to Assess Food Security from an Inuit Perspective: Building a Conceptual Framework on How to Assess Food Security in the Alaskan Arctic. Through workshops, focus group meetings, research, and analysis associated with that project, a central theme emerged: that food security and food sovereignty were undeniably linked. It was concluded that without food sovereignty, we cannot realize food security. The key recommendation derived from that report is to analyze management and co-management structures within Inuit Nunaat and to understand how those governing frameworks need to be modified to achieve Inuit food sovereignty. The FSSG project aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of existing and emerging frameworks supporting Inuit self-governance by examining the current management and co-management of Arctic marine food resources. The three key objectives of the project are:

- Synthesize and evaluate existing frameworks for Inuit management and co-management of marine food resources presently reflected in law, policies, and legal authorities in the United States and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of Canada;
- Evaluate how existing Inuit self-governance is operationalized by examining four co-management case studies focused on marine resources that are aimed at ensuring food sovereignty, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social, political, and institutional parameters affecting implementation of key legal frameworks;
- Assess how Inuit self-governance supports food security by evaluating food sovereignty objectives against the existing legal and structural frameworks and their effective implementation and outcomes

The work is structured around four case studies – salmon and walrus in Alaska and char and beluga in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. These case studies are used as a pathway to a larger, interrelated discussion about management and food sovereignty.

The project is made up of a team that includes the Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska, The Inuit Circumpolar Council Chair, and the Environmental Law Institute. Other partners include the Association of Village Council Presidents, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Eskimo Walrus Commission, Inuvialuit Game Council, and the Fisheries Joint Management Committee. The project is guided by an Advisory Committee made up of the project partners and further advised by the Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada.

The final report is scheduled for completion by May 1, 2020.

## About the Inuvialuit Game Council Focus Group Meeting

On June 19, 2018, the Inuit Circumpolar Council – Alaska (ICC AK) facilitated a focus group meeting with the Inuvialuit Game Council (IGC) as part of the Inuit led project, *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources* (FSSG). The goal of IGC Focus Group was to bring together Inuit to explore current management and co-management structures and decision-making pathways with the ultimate goal of developing a comprehensive understanding of existing and emerging frameworks that support Inuit self-governance.

The Focus group participants included the appointed members of the IGC at the time of the meeting. Through this focus group, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) holders discussed co-management structures, policies and decision-making pathways surrounding the management of resources, and ways of moving toward Inuit food sovereignty. This report provides a summary of the information discussed during the IGC Focus Group Meeting.

Six IK experts (referred to as participants within the report) made up the focus group. Due to weather, one IGC member was unable to attend the meeting. Carolina Behe (project lead for ICC – Alaska) and Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough (international chair of ICC and co-principal investigator for the FSSG project) facilitated the focus group meeting. Quyanainni to those who were able to attend:

Hans Lennie  
Vernon Amos  
Charles Gruben  
Lawrence Ruben  
John Lucas, Jr.  
Jordan McLeod



Photo: Carolina Behe



Photo: Carolina Behe

## Meeting Structure

The focus group was structured around methodologies developed in conjunction with the project partners and FSSG Advisory Committee. Throughout the day, we promoted a flexible and relaxed environment. Focus was placed on exchange of information through deep discussion as a group. During the workshop, participants were encouraged to talk and express themselves in any way they felt they needed to.

## Report Summary

This report provides a brief summary and general overview of the focus group meeting discussions and is not intended to be a complete review. Though this report has been broken into sections, all sections are interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible. For example, when speaking about the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, one must also consider youth education and involvement in co-management.

## Key Themes/Concepts Discussed

The IGC Focus Group Meeting was facilitated using the guiding questions that were informed by the ICC Alaska food security report (How to Assess Food Security from an Inuit Perspective: Building a Conceptual Framework on How to Assess Food Security in the Alaskan Arctic) and further refined by the FSSG Advisory Committee. The guiding questions revolved around the following key themes:

- Personal experiences in gathering food
- Consultation processes as they relate to or impact to food gathering activities
- Decision-making pathways
- IK and research questions
- Information accessibility and knowledge sharing
- Taking care of the Arctic and what tools are used



- Impacts of regulations on the wellbeing of animals, land and water, and Inuit

While the meeting was facilitated using guiding questions under key themes/concepts, the discussions were further focused and refined by the participants. Key themes/concepts and findings include:

- Community hunting programs sponsored by HTC's
- Media relationships and cultural misunderstandings
- Interpretation of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement
- Challenges related to shipping
- Barriers to Food Sovereignty
- Challenges with adaptability and speed in the decision-making process
- The importance of Inuit languages
- Equity of funding
- IK Reflected in Management

### On Personal Experiences

To begin the IGC Focus Group, participants were asked about their personal experiences in gathering food for their families and communities. One participant described some of the many changes that have occurred within living memory. Participants noted that many people are still adapting to the many changes that have occurred within their lifetimes.

Participants went on to describe the previous harvesting season. They noted that, over the past several years, harvesters have felt rushed by the seasons to get everything done on time due to weather unpredictability.

However, it was agreed that the previous season (2018 spring) had been a lot more similar to what they used to expect, before the climate started to rapidly change. As one participant commented, "We are so rushed by the seasons to get everything done and now that it's back to how it was before the climate change really hit us; it's nice to go out there and not have to rush to do everything. You get everything you need and there's still time... but that's the instability of the thing—I wouldn't



Photo: Carolina Behe

trust my instincts to this year to say it's going to happen next year. I mean, it's all different."

The participants indicated that sharing of food was strong with the return to a more easily predictable and longer hunting season with better snow conditions. Participants noted that the practice of sharing is so central to Inuit ways, it will never disappear. But people are able to share more when there is more food available.

When discussing personal experiences, participants also commented on the Community Harvesting Assistance Program which allows Hunters and Trappers Committees (HTCs) to help community members get out on the land. For example, communities have put funding towards caribou hunts in the fall time, distributed shotgun shells to hunters, and provided money for gas. These programs have helped to ease the economic difficulties of having to travel farther to harvest food. Participants indicated that another benefit of these programs is that they encourage community members to share: "It's a good way to keep the community working together."



Photo: Carolina Behe

## **On Consultation Processes**

The Consultation process was a main focus of the IGC Focus group discussion. Participants were asked how the consultation process made them feel and whether or not consultation or the goals of consultation differs dependent on which agency is consulting. Participants indicated that although they are generally happy with the overall process and the decision-making pathways that are currently in place, the feeling during and after consultation occurs is not always positive.

Negatives feelings are due in part to sometimes strained relationships with representatives of federal or territorial governments involved in the co-management processes. Participants identified federal and territorial

leadership turnover as a major problem when it comes to forging positive working relationships with co-managers. It was shared that as representatives of these governments (both scientists and decisions makers) learn about the co-management process that has been agreed upon and become intimately familiar with the IFA, the consultation process runs more smoothly and becomes more meaningful.

One participant indicated that they have noticed an increasing amount of representation that lacks decision-making authority attending consultation meetings, commenting “Earlier on, they would send higher level people that can come and sit down with you, you look them in the eye and you make decisions there on the spot. Those people were fairly knowledgeable” later adding “sometimes you're sitting there across the table with someone who knows absolutely nothing about your land claim and can't tie their shoes without going back to their office and speaking with their superior.”

Participants also noted that they are sometimes completely ignored during decision-making processes that should include meaningful consultation. One example provided was the decision-making process regarding an oil and gas moratorium. Participants indicated that that decision was made by the federal government with no engagement with Inuvialuit:



Photo: Carolina Behe

“when we did formulate a response, we got a letter back from Prime Minister Harper thanking us for our interest and that was the last we heard of it. We have heard nothing from the current government about that. No consultation, none.”

Participants also pointed out that bad media or misunderstandings with the broader public can cause hasty decisions to be made which interrupt the consultation process. Participants discussed an example of media coverage that wrongly portrayed Inuvialuit as wasting beaver meat as part of their beaver culling program. Inuvialuit understand that in using beavers, you can



either collect the hides or use the meat, but cannot use both. They noted that quick decisions were made by agency people in an attempt to appease the media audiences and Inuvialuit were not adequately or meaningfully consulted. As one participant explained: "As soon as they started finding beaver carcasses in the dump, someone contacted CBC and all of a sudden the program just stopped. But they were still doing something with the hides so there was nothing wrong."



Photo: Carolina Behe

Participants noted that meaningful participation is a term that they are trying to take ownership of. They noted that the term meaningful participation does not mean the same thing that it did in the past. Meaningful participation is Inuit engaged in decision-making, leading to decisions that are meaningful to us and to them rather than just including Inuit at

the table. It is also important that consultation take place in the ISR, and that Inuvialuit should not always be expected to travel to outside agencies.

It was additionally highlighted that consultation should be face to face. One participant explained why face to face consultation is integral to meaningful consultation commenting: "In my eyes or in my opinion, consultation is face to face. That way, I get to tell just by looking at you whether you're lying or you're submitting or you're going to comply. I get to see the reaction of your face or the people that you're with. Through the phone I can't. I can imply something by the sound of their voices but that's it. But face to face meetings are where I get to express myself, I get to see where they are coming from. I have a better feeling as to what decision to make after that."

Participants described the frustration of consultation that has not felt meaningful. For example, at times it feels that federal or territorial representatives have already made up their minds. As one participant put it: "They take all of your data that you've given them and they make up their

minds and then sometimes it comes back really against what you wanted or the information that you gave them .” One participant commented that the federal government (as well as international governments) are particularly guilty of this. International climate change policy was used as an example, and it was noted that federal governments are not making smart decisions. It was further stressed that there is a need to take a strong bottom up approach, with direction and solutions coming from Inuit communities.

Participants also commented that cultural misunderstandings can hinder meaningful consultation. For example, when Inuvialuit are quiet or don't speak a lot during meetings, that does not mean that they are complying or agreeing with what is being said. As one participant put it: “We have a lot of good people that sit in meetings that don't really say much, but I know that their engines are turning, their wheels are turning and they're coming up with an answer. ...it's not that they're afraid to talk, they just have a different way of expressing themselves. Some are silent and strong.”

Cultural misunderstandings and prejudices can greatly affect morale and cause Inuit to feel disrespected. One participant recalled when a federal agency representative made a televised statement regarding the decline of caribou populations, suggesting that Inuvialuit learn to eat moose. The participant commented: “They said the caribou were in decline, we argued about it. A month later on TV... [the representative], states to us, the Inuvialuit, you have to learn how to eat moose...Learn how to eat moose? We don't get moose in [all of our communities]”



Photo: Carolina Behe

During the Focus Group, participants were asked whether differences in consultation process exist among different federal and territorial agencies. Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on if the territorial and federal government typically have the same goals and objectives. Participants

commented that consultation processes and outcomes can differ depending on which federal or territorial government agency or manager they are working with. One participant reflected on ease of consultation with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) versus federal representative, noting that the federal government (and to a lesser extent, the territorial government) seems to always be resisting standards agreed upon in the IFA.

Participants further identified that individual managers and decision makers can change the process and outcomes of consultation. Sometimes satisfaction with the consultation process can depend on who, specifically, you are working with. One participant commented: "Some people have a bone to pick with the Inuvialuit, it's not the government or a branch of the government or a department or even a section. Sometimes it just comes down to the individual that you're working with."

Participants agreed that an ideal management situation would be full Inuit food sovereignty. As one participant commented: "Simply put if the governments could just leave us alone, let us oversee our traditional way of living without any regulations, policies, or bylaws. Anything to impede us in terms of living our life, life would be so much simpler. But there's the government. Federal, Local, regional, they're there. So we have to somehow live with those regulations in place. But in this case food sovereignty means that we get to have not a say, but we are the decision makers in terms of quotas on bow head, beluga, walrus, polar bears, muskox, caribou. We get to set a direction for our way of living."

### **On Barriers to Food Sovereignty**

Participants were asked to identify what is supporting or impeding self-determination and food sovereignty and, further, to identify what is needed on a national and international level to support food sovereignty. While this concept recurred throughout most of the discussion during the IGC Focus Group, participants also specifically identified additional factors that impede food sovereignty including poor representation, difficulties with the process of reversing older decisions, dealing with bureaucracy, and dealing with the effects of negative media.

Participants indicated that because the IFA supports food sovereignty from a management standpoint, people are now able to focus on some of the political aspects of consultation that impede food sovereignty. Examples given were when ill-informed members who do not have enough IK of hunting, fishing, and harvesting get involved in politics and try to make decisions about hunting, fishing, and harvesting. Participants also noted that navigating through the process of reversing formerly agreed-upon decisions that no longer work for Inuvialuit can be cumbersome and slow.

Several participants described how dealing with “red tape”, bureaucracy, and non-management agencies when trying to practice Inuit ways of life can impede food sovereignty. The example identified here was trying to build an ice house in Ulukhaktok. One participant described this situation how the permitting for building an ice house complicated the process to such an extent that the community decided to back off from the idea. The participant described, “They needed a mining permit. They needed all of this different confined spaces and mining training, and then it just got so cumbersome they just backed away from that idea. But that is a traditional practice that we had always used, and now it seems that that’s being chipped away it.”

Participants identified negative media and misplaced pressures from the outside world as a factor that impedes food sovereignty. It was emphasized that the outside world often does not understand Inuit management practices. As further discussed in the above “On Consultation” section, negative press can impede food sovereignty by spurring outside entities to make decisions without consulting IGC. Another example provided by participants was the

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*“We have learned there's so much hurdles to go past to do something simple, that just, I don't know, to me it's out of hand sometimes. Just to dig a little hole, you've got to go get the five different permits, and people think about stuff... I'll just stay away from that. It doesn't make you move forward.”*

-Meeting Participant

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changing of northern and southern boundaries and lowering of the quota for polar bear. Participants indicated that this was a decision that was born out of pressures from the U.S. federal government, and international “conservation/animals rights” movements. As one participant commented, “us being conservationists, we wanted the world to see us that way, [so] we

accepted that. And that's where we're at right now. Everybody lost a few tags and so everybody accepted that for conservation efforts." This further stress the need to understand that Inuit practices are rooted in conservation that focus on conservation through use and respect for all of life.

## On Decision-Making Pathways

During the Focus Group, participants spent time describing the many decision-making pathways that exist in the ISR. Participants highlighted the strengths of the IFA and described some of the successes that the ISR has had in furthering Inuit food sovereignty through the IFA, "The IFA is a pretty strong claim that other places are trying to catch up to. We broke a lot of trail." Participants outlined the structure of the co-management bodies in the ISR, making special note to discuss the fact that not all community needs are the same across the board. As one participant commented, "Something to keep in mind too, and as different as the Inupiat and Inuvialuit are in their management for marine species, that there are major differences even amongst the communities in the ISR too. Where I'm from, there's no development. There are no major projects. There's no tourism. A lot of the pressure is what they have to deal with here and then work around." Participants commented that each HTC does their part to address the needs and the resources of their community, but that ultimately the HTCs work together and that support is provided to other HTCs, particularly in decision-making for issues which affect one community over others.

While discussing decision-making pathways, participants were asked if the federal and territorial representatives that they work are familiar with and understand the IFA, whether or not they are implementing the IFA in the same way Inuvialuit are, and whether or not they are willing to take direction from Inuvialuit in order to better understand the IFA. Participants commented that many of the people they work with do not understand the process of the IFA. They noted that this can hinder the process and slow things down. Participants described the frustration of working with people who do not understand the agreements and



Photo: Carolina Behe



processes. As one participant commented, "It's really frustrating sometimes. Trying to deal with people who know absolutely nothing. And they are the people that are supposed to be your partner. It's not just our land claim, the government signed it too... How are you supposed to implement something that only one side knows what's going on?"



Photo: Carolina Behe

Participants also discussed how the interpretation of the IFA is flexible and can shift dependent on needs. Participants noted that this flexibility is a great strength of the IFA but also identified dangers and drawbacks. The strength of the IFA's flexibility is that it can be treated as a living document that is able to adapt with the times. One participant explained: "We're always looking at our own bylaws within ourselves that we make. We need to update them. It has to be moving forward all the time. Because a lot of the time, some of that stuff is handcuffing us. Which is not good. The right intent was there back in the day. But the world evolved, we got evolved with it. That's the only way." However, noted that due to the flexibility in interpretation, it is very important that Inuvialuit remain firm in their own interpretation: "If I interpret it one way and the government officials, be it federal or territorial or even NGO's, interpret it another way, I am going to have to be more forceful in the way that I interpret it as opposed to the person sitting across from me. I have to make sure that my interpretation would stand on firm ground. And that's how I feel, I have to interpret the IFA in my eyes and stand firm on it. I can't waiver. If I do, it means I'm accepting another person's interpretation of the IFA, which makes it weaker. For myself and for everyone."

Participants also recognized the challenge and importance of educating the younger generation and the new generation of leaders on how to understand and interpret the IFA. Education on the IFA and decision-making pathways within the ISR is crucial to the continued success of IFA implementation.

### **On Equity of Funding**

Participants were asked to reflect on the equity of distribution of monetary resources and to discuss whether Inuvialuit entities are provided with enough

money to gather all of the information needed for the decisions that they want to make. Participants commented that the money that is made available to IGC from the Canadian government for implementation of the IFA is limited and less than what other First Nations groups receive. In order to gather the information needed to co-manage the resources, Inuvialuit have to be strategic in trying to make a little go a long way. One participant commented: "the big guys versus the little guys in some cases; it is whoever carries the biggest stick with the amount of money you have."

As a result of limited funding certain aspects of management can fall by the wayside. For example there is a lack of funding for law enforcement systems that would help Inuvialuit to regulate hunting activities. In communities, there are patrol people who can take information, but they are not able to make any



Photo: Carolina Behe

charges. One participant commented: "I've yet to come across an RCMP that knows anything about the Wildlife Act. So really there's no enforcement in the smaller communities. And we were setting up the Land Claim that's really the way we wanted it, we didn't want to be convicting or charging our own people, so we left that to the government."

Participants commented that Inuvialuit should also have greater control over how monies are allocated or spent. Participants described routinely butting heads with the governments over whether IFA monies should be spent on research projects which Inuvialuit people do not prioritize. As one participant stated: "They want to do some study on some insect or a study on some songbird or some shorebird that we don't really harvest, that we don't really feel is a priority right now and for whatever reason, they feel it's a priority. It starts the process over again where we butt heads with them again. Sometimes it comes out in our favor, sometimes it doesn't but if it's money to implement a land claim we feel that they should be giving us a greater say or more control over how those monies are spent."

## On Indigenous Knowledge and Research questions

During the Focus Group, participants were asked if IK is given the same weight and attention as science when it comes to research. Participants explained that the IFA lays out strong pathways to promote the inclusion of, and focus on, IK. For example, if a researcher has a thesis, they must bring it to the community first to ensure that it complies with the community's evaluation before submitting it to their universities. In this way, Inuvialuit have an opportunity to review research proposals and results before a report is released.



Photo: Carolina Behe

This is also true for management-related research. Participants used the example of a shipping guidelines draft which they had recently reviewed prior to a shipping conference. The guidelines were proposing allowing for tourists to come on shore to go fishing, even though the shores were private lands. Because Inuvialuit were able to review the guidelines prior to submission,

they were able to make recommendations which were then used to amend the guidelines.

However, participants noted that there are challenges that come along with the research review process. For example, the expectation to wade through and interpret thick legal or academic documents. Due to time and funding limitations, this often means that IGC can only skim rather than fully read and analyze presented findings. An additional obstacle arises in working with people who do not understand Inuvialuit systems or lands.

As a result of the direction of this discussion, participants were also asked whether or not they felt that they have to spend a lot of time reacting to what researchers are proposing rather than putting forward and focusing on what they want to prioritize. Participants indicated that having to constantly react to research ideas that are put forward by the federal or territorial governments, (and non-government entities), slows and hinders the advancement of meaningful research projects. However, participants highlighted that progress has been made as Inuvialuit have taken more

control. Notably, Inuvialuit have put their foot down on projects that are “research for research’s sake.” One example of this is a small bird study proposed by the government. Inuvialuit determined that it didn’t make sense to research small birds, pointing out that the government was willing to spend hundreds or thousands of dollars to discover that there are small bird nests in certain areas that Inuit already know of.

One participant explained that reacting to government proposals is not always a negative experience. They used the example of the implementation of a harvest monitoring survey that was put in place following the Macondo incident (also known as the Deepwater Horizon explosion in the Gulf of Mexico). The participant commented: “we have a really healthy and robust harvest monitoring survey that's done in each community every month...we have enough data to go on now, where if anything did happen, we could prove how we were affected by disasters like Macondo.”

Participants identified an additional challenge in implementing their own research plans. For example, Inuvialuit have proposed monitoring ice year round within a marine protected area—a concept which MPA managers had not considered. However, there is no funding mechanism in place to support the collection of this agreed upon important baseline information.

### **On Indigenous Knowledge Reflected in Management**



Photo: Carolina Behe

During the Focus Group, participants were asked to discuss if Inuvialuit traditional practices and rules are reflected in the co-management process and decision-making. Participants highlighted the fact that IGC exists to ensure that a high importance is placed on IK. Strong efforts are put toward bringing IK forward and including this knowledge systems within baseline data.

Participants explained that—as with research—management policy decisions must be accepted by IGC. There is a process of back and forth that allows Inuvialuit to review and ensure that decisions are acceptable: “If they say they

are done their report and we don't think so then it comes back to the table. If we don't accept it as a final report, then they have to review it again. We make sure that happens, because if we don't feel that we are benefiting from it then it has to come back to the table."

However, participants also identified obstacles that exist within this process, noting that governments, particularly the federal government, have ways of overriding or skirting around IK and Inuvialuit input. Participants provided examples of federal bodies that they feel are not taking IK seriously and/or making decision far from the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (lacking situational awareness). Participants indicated that far away decision-making goes against the process laid out in the IFA and impedes food sovereignty.

Participants described a pathway to address such concerns as they come up. An example was provided when a federal agency was making decisions without consultation, the IGC invited the agency to consult with them and recommended that they include an IGC member on decisions that will affect Inuvialuit. At the time of the focus group meeting, IGC was awaiting a response from the agency. Due to these challenges, one participant commented that, overall, there is work to be done on achieving greater focus on IK in research and management: "Almost every project it's either or—it's either science or TK. It's never an equal combination of both. It's always either or and I don't know how to change that but that's something we have to figure out."

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*"They make a decision without getting their feet wet. Without coming up here and looking at or even discussing with us the situation .... They get to make the decisions on our way of living...I couldn't accept that. So I spoke out in one of the meetings that you have to take the social aspect of it has to be taken into effect. If you make a decision then you have to see how you're restricting our lifestyle. And I hope they do that in the future. And that's a part of food sovereignty."*

-Meeting Participant

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## **On Impacts of Regulations**

During the Focus Group, participants were asked if regulations that were made by the territorial or federal government have produced any unforeseen impacts. Participants commented that past regulations and law enforcement



practices vastly interrupted the Inuit way of life that had been freely practiced before. This has negatively impacted animals and animal populations and has had long-lasting effects on subsistence hunters, traditional Inuit laws, and the mentality of hunters surrounding what is legal or safe. Participants provided examples of such impacts, including the following:

- When the federal and territorial governments decided that snow geese were declining so created regulations that prevented Inuit from harvesting snow geese. After a time, the geese became incredibly overpopulated to the point where their population was out of control. Now, the governments are asking Inuvialuit to shoot the geese to help control the population. Participants stressed that if Inuvialuit had been allowed to practice their normal traditions, there would be no population issue. Regarding the negative impacts that government regulations have had, one participant commented “What they're thinking is they're helping us, but really they're hindering our way of living.”
- When oil and gas was booming (before the implementation of the IFA), Inuvialuit lacked legal pathways to have a say in the high amount of activities associated with extractive industry. Participants shared that related activities were a constant interference with harvesting.

Many examples were provided which highlighted the repression that was felt by the previous generation, before the creation of the IFA. Participants described the following regulations as both stifling and fear-inducing:

- After reindeer were introduced, Inuvialuit were barred from hunting caribou or trapping in the area. A large swath of land was turned into, for all intents and purposes, a reindeer reserve. Inuvialuit were forced to go outside of the “reserve” boundary in order to hunt caribou, which meant up to 100 miles or more of travel to the Anderson River area. If a hunter harvested a caribou, they were forced to identify it as a caribou rather than a reindeer and if a person accidentally shot a reindeer that had strayed from the reserve, they would be charged by the game wardens regardless of where the reindeer was shot. Hunters became afraid to hunt caribou because the boundaries of the “reserve” were not clearly defined and because it was difficult to tell a reindeer from a caribou.

- Regulations existed which barred Inuvialuit from hunting swans and beavers. So people would gather at a secret spot on the river to pluck swans and skin beaver, trying to hide from the game wardens: "There's a secret spot where they would pluck swans and skin their beaver there only. That was it. Because they were so scared of the system. That's how it was then, back in the day."



Photo: Carolina Behe

Participants emphasized that these past hardships are what inspired the creation of the IFA. They credit the IFA with greatly increasing the level of food sovereignty and self-determination that Inuvialuit now have when it comes to their resources. However, some limitations still exist and participants identified areas where work is still needed in order to move towards

increased food sovereignty. A main example used by participants to explain this situation were the regulations surrounding caribou harvesting. Participants commented that one time, Inuvialuit were able to practice subsistence freely, using their traditional rules and laws. Now, Inuvialuit have to consider such regulations as legal hunting seasons, management zones, tag zones, obtaining tags, and avoiding traditional harvesting areas that are now off limits. One participant noted: "At one time, you could hunt caribou any time. Through the whole year...Now we've got a management zone, we've got a tag zone...Stuff like that we try to work with or get used to but it creates hardship for people with regards to harvesting food."

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*"Now, you have to look at the book and wonder, okay, what am I hunting, allowed to hunt at this time of the year without having to get permits or follow the book?"*

-Meeting Participant

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## On Adaptability

During the Focus Group, participants indicated that the process of decision-making can often take a long time. Adaptability and quick decision-making are present in Inuit traditional management, but that adaptability is often not present in co-management processes. To further this discussion, participants were asked to identify some of the challenges that are faced in navigating a slow-moving decision-making process in a quickly changing world.

Participants emphasized that the co-management process in place, while sometimes slow-moving, is favorable because there are many points at which Inuvialuit are able to make their recommendations and bring the focus back to IK. However, participants noted that there is room for improvement,



Photo: Carolina Behe

particularly when it comes to adaptability and speed of decision-making. One participant commented: "In the bigger scheme of things, co-management works. But when you get down to micromanaging... It's just that the micromanaging and co-management sometimes it slows things down."

Participants noted that it can be frustrating to witness quick decision-making occurring when it comes to issues that the territorial or federal government prioritize. As one participant commented: "[if] we wanted to reverse it, it could take forever... there is a process with the territorial and federal governments, but it happens quicker if they want to change things." Quick decision-making by the government without adequate input from Inuit can also negatively impact animals and communities.

Participants indicated that government sees adaptation in a different light than do Inuvialuit, often lacking a holistic view of the environment. Participants provided the example of the government making a "knee-jerk" decision which result in the shutdown of caribou hunting based solely on information given to them by Environment and Natural Resources (ENR). One participant described the decision, stating "We accepted that they shut down sport hunting, but the point is that they made that decision based only on their

numbers, without taking into account our perspective. We didn't have a way to get our point across." Participants noted that such decisions, made by the government without Inuvialuit input, feel very uncomfortable. They emphasized that sport hunting bans are relevant to Inuvialuit economies and affect Inuvialuit people. After the caribou sport hunting ban, economies within the ISR did suffer due to the disappearance of guiding-related revenue.

The overall feeling of such decisions is that the government expects quick or even immediate adaptation from Inuvialuit (i.e. regarding issues which they prioritize). But when Inuvialuit see a need for adaptation, those decisions can be slow or tedious. As one participant commented: "The government may imply that we adapt to this immediately... It doesn't work that way... it takes time to adapt to those. It's not automatic."



Photo: Carolina Behe

Further frustration lies in the fact that many decision-making processes appear to be driven by money and can additionally be slowed by difficulties in getting the territorial or federal government departments to take responsibility for specific issues. Participants pointed out that certain programs and projects that would benefit communities (for example, ideas of how

to deal with beaver over population), are halted or slowed due to funding issues and/or the government's lack of clarity and commitment regarding which department should take on co-management responsibility.

## On Language

Throughout the FSSG project, the importance of Inuit languages in traditional management and co-management has been stressed. During the Focus Group, participants were asked to reflect on language and food sovereignty.

The freedom to use Inuvialuit in management settings is important because it is such a descriptive and expressive language. Participants emphasized that Inuvialuktun speakers are often able to describe resources and IK in richer detail and more concisely in their Native tongue. Speaking in our language

can also create a more comfortable management environment. One participant stated: "Language plays a big, important role in the consultation... maybe all of us don't understand our language but that should still be made available whenever there's consultation. Just speak to these people in their own language. A lot of them, they feel more comfortable. A lot of them, that's the only language they know."

Participants noted that a challenge faced in including Inuit languages in consultation lies in the fact that a great many management and development related words have no direct translation into Inuvialuktun or other Inuit languages (for example, such terms as "consultation" and "traditional knowledge" have no direct translation). Participants commented that there are sometimes gatherings of elders who come together to try to come up with new Inuvialuktun words to describe English words or concepts.

Participants also commented that even getting people to use the name Inuvialuit and to understand that Inuvialuit are an individual group, not just Inuit and not just First Nations, has been a challenge.

## **Conclusion**

During the IGC Focus Group Meeting, Inuit co-managers came together to have in depth discussions regarding what supports or impedes Inuit food sovereignty and exploring what the co-management system set in place by the Inuvialuit Final Agreement looks like in ISR. The meeting provided an important building block in the Food Sovereignty and Self Governance project.

This report provides a brief summary of the discussion that took place over the course of the day-long meeting. The knowledge, ideas, and recommendations shared during this focus group as well as those shared in focus groups, meetings, workshops, and interviews that have helped to build the FSSG project will be shared in the final FSSG report. The final report is scheduled to be completed by May 1, 2020.