



ICC Press Release

## **Inuit Call for Arctic Underwater Noise Pollution Reduction at Global Shipping Negotiations**

*New guidelines include recommendations for shipping in Inuit Nunaat*

London UK - Friday, January 27, 2023

As this week's deliberations wrapped up at the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) debate on reducing underwater noise from ships, Inuit Circumpolar Council spoke up to ensure Inuit Nunaat (The Inuit homeland encompasses Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Chukotka in Russia) remained top of mind for member states.

"Marine traffic is increasing in the seas of Inuit Nunaat. We must reduce underwater noise, as its impacts can have severe consequences for the wildlife Inuit depend on. Any damage to wildlife along the coasts of Inuit Nunaat will affect the living resources we harvest, and thus Inuit livelihoods, culture and ultimately our access to upholding our food sovereignty", said ICC Chair Sara Olsvig.

Effects from ship underwater noise on marine wildlife can include behavioral and acoustic disturbances that affect hearing. It can also create stress and disrupt marine mammal migration patterns, feeding and mating.

"What we've seen from Indigenous Knowledge and academic research is that noise pollution from ships has a unique and significant impact in our Arctic marine waters. Noise travels longer distances in cold water and most marine mammals aren't used to it. That means there are disproportionate impacts compared to other regions", said ICC Vice Chair Lisa Koperqualuk.

An Arctic Council report from 2021 found that underwater noise from shipping in the Arctic Ocean doubled in just six years. This is significant considering that it took decades for other parts of the world to experience those types of increases. The research also found that where shipping overlaps with high concentrations of marine mammals, underwater noise was also high. This reality increases the urgency for reducing noise pollution from ships and developing measures which can turn down the sound quickly.

"We are encouraged that Inuit interests were considered this week during the deliberations on reducing underwater noise from ships," said Vice Chair Koperqualuk who attended this week's IMO meeting in London. "Indigenous Knowledge has been included as a consideration within the revised guidelines, and Inuit Nunaat has been recognized as needing unique operational guidelines when vessels transit its waters."

The current IMO underwater noise reduction and management guidelines and the revised guidelines being finalized this week are voluntary.

"Unfortunately, the Arctic sees the consequences of the guidelines being voluntary. There is very little uptake by shipping owners and operators and noise levels are increasing," Vice Chair Koperqualuk pointed out. "The IMO needs to develop mandatory measures to ensure more comprehensive implementation, such as mandating each vessel to have a noise reduction plan and specific vessel reduction targets."

The fact that the IMO includes Inuit in its deliberations on underwater noise is consequential when it comes to Indigenous Rights, implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge. There is a commitment within the terms of reference for the updating of the IMO's underwater noise guidelines to: "enable engagement of Inuit and other Indigenous communities and the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge."

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) has called for including an 'Arctic Annex' in the guidelines as a way to account for the special case of the Arctic marine environment. This would assist IMO members to begin to implement the UNDRIP and concretely include Indigenous Knowledge and the equitable engagement of Inuit in the governance and ongoing policy making at the IMO.

The IMO's Ship Design and Construction sub-committee (SDC) recommended to its larger decision making body, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, to approve the new shipping voluntary underwater noise guidelines agreed to during discussions this week.

Contact:

Tukumminnguaq Olsen

ICC (Greenland and Chairs office)

[tukumminnguaq@inuit.org](mailto:tukumminnguaq@inuit.org)

Melodie Lavallée

ICC (Canada)

[mlavallee@inuitcircumpolar.com](mailto:mlavallee@inuitcircumpolar.com)

Eilene Adams

ICC (Alaska)

[eilene@iccalaska.org](mailto:eilene@iccalaska.org)

---

Founded in 1977 by the late Eben Hopson of Sr. of Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow), Alaska, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) has flourished and grown into a major international non-governmental organization representing approximately 180,000 Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life.