



PRESS RELEASE

ICC Commends Support for Pikialasorsuaq Inuit Marine Management and Inuit Mobility Rights

October 19, 2023 – Reykjavik, Iceland – ICC applauds the signing of the Letter of Intent (LOI) between the Government of Canada and Kalaallit Nunaat which advances the recommendations from the 2017 ICC led Pikialasorsuaq Commission report, *People of the Ice Bridge: The Future of the Pikialasorsuaq*. The Pikialasorsuaq is a marine area between Avanersuaq in northwestern Greenland and northern Nunavut in Canada.

The Letter of Intent supports a partnership between the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, the Governments of Canada, Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark, to develop a path forward for advancing the sustainable marine management and environmental protection of the Pikialasorsuaq region, and to facilitate free mobility for Inuit of the region.

Pikialasorsuaq the Kalaallisut (Western Greenlandic) name meaning “great upwelling”, and Sarvarjuaq the Inuktitut name for “the place that never freezes” on the Qikiqtani side of the North Water polynya. This marine region is shared between Canada (Nunavut) and Kalaallit Nunaat. Polynyas are areas of open water that remain ice-free year-round due to ocean and wind currents. It’s incredibly rich and teeming with marine life. The Pikialaorsuaq is the largest polynya in the Arctic and the most biologically productive region north of the Arctic Circle.

The Pikialasorsuaq is changing. Communities on both sides of the marine region have noticed changes in nature and access to traditional livelihoods, because of increased activity and climate change.

ICC Chair Sara Olsvig noted, “Inuit knowledge will continue to inform our work in the Pikialasorsuaq/Sarvarjuaq region. Including Indigenous knowledge and other knowledge systems, Inuit will work to manage this region in partnership, define its border. The Pikialasorsuaq region bears a deep cultural significance to Inuit, and an invaluable ecological value to the planet. Our main incentive is to maintain access to the living resources generated from Pikialasorsuaq for generations and generations to come. Going ahead, we will continue to advance the mobility Inuit once enjoyed moving freely within Inuit Nunaat and by doing so maintaining our family connections and our culture”. “We believe that this initiative provides a

unique opportunity for us to come together to strengthen Inuit led marine conservation and build new approaches where Inuit share in marine governance and future opportunities.”

Olayuk Akesuk, President of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association offered, “The signing of the Letter of Intent and implementation of shared priorities on conserving Pikialasorsuaq underscores the importance of collaborative solutions for Inuit-led conservation in the Arctic. Our shared efforts are not only culturally significant but also indispensable in maintaining ocean health and addressing the challenges of climate change. Implementation of the key recommendations from the 2017 Commission’s Report are critical to Inuit on both sides of the North Water Polynya. Qikiqtani Inuit are actively engaged in conserving the living resources within and adjacent to Pikialasorsuaq therein securing related health and wellbeing for Qikiqtani communities.

The Pikialasorsuaq/Sarvajuaq is a culturally important region for Inuit who have cared for, managed, used and occupied this marine region for millennia. “The Pikialasorsuaq has deep meaning for Inuit in Nunavut and Kalaallit Nunaat,” said ICC Vice Chair Koperqualuk. “We have depended on the resources for thousands of years for our food security, our culture and knowledge, to travel across, and as a meeting place between our families. This initiative will support strong Inuit communities through the protection of the environment and preserving the biodiversity of this unique region.”

“This Letter of Intent is an important step in advancing Inuit led management across Inuit Nunaat and supports a paradigm shift towards implementing the vision of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” offered ICC Chair Olsvig.

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