



PRESS RELEASE

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Advances Indigenous Knowledge and Rights at the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

January 31, 2024 – London, UK— Indigenous rights have been affirmed during the negotiations last week at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in a fundamental way. Articles 29, 41, 42 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which emphasize the importance of environmental protection, utilization for harvesting, and the responsibility of states to apply the UN Declaration, were included in the Action Plan to reduce underwater radiated noise from shipping. The [Inuit Nunaat Guidelines](#) were also re-affirmed and widely accepted by the global maritime community.

“We are encouraged by the progress made last week”, said ICC Vice Chair and Head of Delegation at the IMO, Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk. “IMO members not only included the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in its plan to carry out the work to reduce underwater noise pollution, but our goal of seeing Indigenous Knowledge utilized throughout the Action Plan and ultimately in the planning, operations, and end goal of reducing noise was successful.”

Progress at the IMO towards limiting noise pollution from shipping comes on the heels of the release of ICC’s [IMO position paper](#), which was a significant move by ICC to play a greater role in global marine governance. “The outcome last week emphasizes the importance of the advocacy ICC has done at the IMO,” said Sara Olsvig, international ICC chair. “Being part of maritime policy making holds immense significance for us, given our inherently interconnected relationship with the marine environment, which we depend on for our hunting and food security and overall health and wellbeing.”

The Action Plan and Experience Building Phase (EBP) framework agreed at last week’s Sub-Committee on Ship Design and Construction (SDC 10) IMO committee meeting now gets forwarded to the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC81) committee for approval. Approval will allow progress for the next three years with an EBP and parallel work to potentially develop mandatory measures with an accompanying Roadmap.

The Guidelines, Action Plan, and EBP remain voluntary. Studies have shown that very little action has occurred to reduce noise while the original voluntary 2014 underwater noise guidelines were in place. This is no more apparent than in the Arctic and Inuit Nunaat, where noise has doubled in the past years and shipping traffic continues to grow. Without mandatory measures, it is highly doubtful that underwater noise levels will decrease. ICC urges Arctic

states, shipping owners, and operators to swiftly implement the current voluntary guidelines and support the development of mandatory measures coming into force as soon as possible.

[A 2021 Arctic Council report](#) found that the amount of underwater noise in the Arctic Ocean doubled in six years between 2013-2019 because of shipping traffic. In other parts of the world, it has taken 30 to 40 years to reach this magnitude of increase. The study also found that underwater noise was high in regions of the Arctic where shipping overlaps with high densities of Arctic marine mammals, including narwhal, bowhead and beluga whales, seals and walrus.

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