



INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL ADVANCE PRECAUTIONARY GOVERNANCE THROUGH NATIONAL DELEGATIONS AT CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN FISHERIES AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

February 27, 2026, Tokyo, Japan - Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) played a central role in advancing the responsible, precautionary governance of the Central Arctic Ocean at the Exploratory Fishing Working Group of the Conference of the Parties to the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA), held in Tokyo, Japan from February 3-5. ICC participated as part of the national delegations of the United States, Canada, and the Kingdom of Denmark, in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland (DFG).

The meeting focused on advancing consensus on the Conservation and Management Measures for Exploratory Fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO). Throughout the negotiations, ICC strongly advocated for the continued inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of the impacts that any research activities and future exploratory fisheries will have on Inuit (Arctic Indigenous Peoples) in the CAO and its adjacent seas.

ICC also pressed for stronger sea ice encounter and avoidance protocols to mitigate impacts from exploratory fishing activities on the CAO's interconnected ecosystems and on Inuit communities who depend on them for our culture, food security, and ways of life. These safeguards are essential to maintaining healthy marine ecosystems now and into the future.

"ICC's participation marks a significant shift in how international ocean governance is shaped, placing Inuit leadership into the decision-making, through the national delegations, before large-scale activities begin, rather than responding after harm occurs. As external pressures and interest in the Arctic continue to grow, the policies established now will determine the future of this Agreement Area and its adjacent seas that Inuit rely on and call home." Says ICC Vice Chair from Alaska, Marie Greene.

Sara Olsvig, Chair of ICC, says *"ICC reaffirmed our ongoing commitment to remain meaningfully engaged in the Agreement's implementation through the national delegations to ensure that Indigenous Knowledge is utilized alongside science as a foundational knowledge system. ICC emphasized that responsible governance of the CAO requires proactive, informed, and forward-looking decision-making."*

Hjalmar Dahl, Vice Chair from Greenland says: *"ICC continues to strongly underscore the precautionary approach that underpins CAOFA. Through this approach, Indigenous Knowledge and scientific research must continue to be brought together to support responsible governance and sustainable use of marine*

resources in the CAO.”

ICC Vice Chair from Canada, Herb Nakimayak says: *“The Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement is a critical space where we not only have a seat at the table, but where our Knowledge shapes the future of the Central Arctic Ocean and how it will be responsibly and sustainably managed. Decisions made now will shape the future of the Central Arctic Ocean for generations. By ensuring our Knowledge systems guide conservation and management measures from the outset, we are protecting marine ecosystems and our communities that depend on them. We have been part of these negotiations from the beginning, and we will continue advocating on behalf of Inuit and our ecosystems - including the sea ice and waters.”*

Background on the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement

The Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA) was signed in 2018 by Canada, the People’s Republic of China, the Kingdom of Denmark, in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. The Agreement entered into force on June 25, 2021.

The objective of the Agreement is to prevent unregulated fishing in the high seas portion of the central Arctic Ocean through the application of precautionary conservation and management measures as part of a long-term strategy to safeguard healthy marine ecosystems and to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of fish stocks.

The Agreement is the first multilateral, legally-binding, international agreement that recognizes the importance of Indigenous Knowledge and Arctic Indigenous Peoples in the precautionary approach. The ICC CAOFA team works collaboratively at the Conference of the Parties (COP), Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) meetings and their Working Groups to represent Inuit on the national delegations of the United States, Canada, and DFG.

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Founded in 1977, Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an international Indigenous Peoples’ Organization representing Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Kalaallit Nunaat, and Chukotka. ICC is dedicated to strengthening Inuit unity, advancing Inuit rights and interests internationally, and formulating long-term policies to protect the Arctic environment. It also strives for full and effective participation and meaningful engagement for Inuit in the political, economic, and social development of the Arctic.

ICC is a co-founder and a Permanent Participant of the Arctic Council and holds a range of international roles, including Consultative Status II at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, Observer status at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and holds Permanent Consultative Status at the International Maritime Organization, alongside other advisory and consultative roles across numerous international forums.

