

**Arctic Observing Summit
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**Pikialasorsuaq Commission: People of the Ice-Bridge
Inuit Led Monitoring of the Pikialasorsuaq**

Observations in the Arctic serve many purposes, from understanding unique Arctic ecosystems to modelling change to predict the future and inform decision making. Inuit knowledge is based on long time observations of Inuit Nunaat (homeland) to better understand the environment and anticipate change. Inuit have the longest temporal and spatial monitoring records in the Arctic and much of this is contained in the oral histories and emerging and evolving Inuit knowledge.

Why is the Pikialasorsuaq Important?

Shared by Canada and Greenland, this is the world's largest Arctic polynya (an area of year-round open water). The Pikialasorsuaq is an Arctic oasis and the most biologically productive region north of the Arctic Circle, providing critical habitat for migratory species (e.g. seabirds, narwhal, arctic cod, and seals) that Inuit depend on.

The polynya is formed by an ice bridge, connecting Ellesmere Island to Northwest Greenland that served as a migration corridor for humans for thousands of years. The northern ice bridge has become less reliable – in warmer years, the polynya fills with ice and, now, does not always form in critical winter months. The consequences of these changes, linked to larger climatic shifts observable in many parts of the Arctic, are not known. And, no management structures or policies presently exist for Inuit and international management of this region.

What is Being Done?

The Pikialasorsuaq Commission was established in 2016 to conduct consultations as to how and when Inuit have travelled and occupied the area, what resources they have harvested and how they would like to protect and manage it into the future given the increased activity through the area. Led by ICC Chair, Okalik Eegeesiak (the International Commissioner); former Nunavut Premier, Eva Aariak (Canadian Commissioner); and, former Greenland Premier, Kuupik Kleist (Greenland Commissioner). People of the Ice Bridge: The Future of the Pikialasorsuaq makes three recommendations:

1. Establish a **management regime led by Inuit representatives** from communities in the Pikialasorsuaq region.
2. In consultation with communities adjacent to the Pikialasorsuaq, **identify a protected area comprised of the polynya itself and a larger management zone** that reflects the connection between communities, their natural resources and the polynya. These areas would be monitored and managed by Inuit in agreement with all parties and formally recognized by governments.

3. **Establish a free travel zone** for Inuit across the Pikialasorsuaq region.

The Next Steps.

The Commission is undertaking ongoing engagement with Inuit to listen to how they want to manage the future of the Pikialasorsuaq and what each organization and community's respective roles should be. Diplomatic efforts by Canada with Denmark and Greenland are underway to discuss instruments, such as the Boundary Waters Treaty and the International Joint Commission, to achieve the recommended objectives.

The Commission is working on the next steps towards the establishment of a marine indigenous protected area, an "Inuit Management Authority". The Pikialasorsuaq itself is approximately 85000 km² and is integral to a much broader ecosystem including Talurutiup Imanga (Lancaster Sound) and Melville Bay.

Coordination of research and monitoring efforts are also continuing with scientific partners. Scientific interest in the North Water is very high with significant research investments by Canadian and European institutions. A workshop in May 2018 will consider the visions of key partners of the Commission recommendations.