

# The Importance of Community Involvement in Arctic Conservation

*Policy Brief prepared for the Arctic Observing Summit, March 2016*

Jennie Knopp<sup>1</sup>, Henry Huntington<sup>2</sup>, Kristin Westdal<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Oceans North Canada
- 2) The Pew Charitable Trusts

## Overview

The principle of Inuit engagement and involvement in activities that affect their lands and livelihoods is important to understand when working in Arctic regions. There are two Inuit organizations that represent and protect the rights of Inuit in Canada. The Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada (ICC-C) works on international social, economic, and environmental issues affecting Inuit in Canada. One of ICC's objectives is to develop and promote policies that safeguard the Arctic environment and promote Inuit rights on the international level.<sup>1</sup> On the national level, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) represents the environmental, social, cultural and political rights of Inuit living in the four Inuit regions in Canada (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut), collectively known as Inuit Nunangat.<sup>2</sup> In order to ensure Inuit in Canada are actively involved in the promotion of their rights, ITK created Inuit Qaujisarvingat (Inuit Knowledge Centre). Inuit Qaujisarvingat is a tool to bridge Inuit and western scientific knowledge with the goal of generating innovative knowledge that improves decision-making throughout Inuit Nunangat.<sup>3</sup>

In 2014, the presidents of ICC-C and ITK wrote a letter to the editor for the journal *Arctic* in response to a declaration written by a group of researchers that had gathered at Lakehead University to discuss "Principles for Research and Development in the North". Inuit were not involved in this gathering or the publication of the declaration. The response to the declaration by T. Audla and D. Smith highlighted that both ITK and ICC-C have done extensive advocacy over more than 40 years, regarding the adoption of principles and practices that reflect Inuit interests, and promote Inuit involvement and engagement in activities that affect Inuit communities and Arctic environments.<sup>4</sup>

The benefits of following the principle of Inuit engagement and involvement in activities that affect their lands and livelihoods can be seen in the world of Arctic conservation. The effectiveness of conservation efforts is improved when all of the best available information is used, and those who rely on the resources being conserved are involved. Oceans North Canada

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/about.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.itk.ca/about-itk>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.itk.ca/about-itk/inuit-qaujisarvingat-inuit-knowledge-centre>

<sup>4</sup> Audla, T., and Smith, D. 2014. Letter to the editor: A principled approach to research and development in Inuit Nunangat starts with the people. *Arctic* 67(1):120 –121. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14430/arctic4375>

(ONC) recognizes that community involvement offers great benefits to Arctic conservation and has invested substantial resources in community-based initiatives across the Canadian Arctic. These initiatives meet two criteria: they must arise from community interest, and they must be relevant to conservation goals. Three examples illustrate our approach and why we believe working with Arctic communities is both necessary and effective.

***1) Passive Acoustic Monitoring of Marine Mammals, Paulatuk and Darnley Bay, Inuvialuit Settlement Region***

From 2013-2015, Oceans North Canada, in collaboration with the Inuvialuit Settlement Region – Community-Based Monitoring Program (ISR-CBMP), the Fisheries Joint Management Committee (FJMC) and the Paulatuk Hunters and Trappers Committee (PHTC), has funded and supported a deeper understanding of beluga habitat use in the Anuniaqvia Niqiqyuam Area of Interest (ANAIOI) for a Marine Protected Area in Darnley Bay and the surrounding area.

The Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) of marine mammals project came about as a direct request by the PHTC. The elected committee members, who represent the wildlife interests of the local community, had on-going concerns about the monitoring of beluga whales in the Darnley Bay region. This is a traditional resource for community members, having relied on beluga for subsistence for generations. The PHTC wanted to explore methods they considered to be non-intrusive for studying beluga. The dominant scientific paradigm emphasizes aerial surveys and tagging of beluga, in addition to harvest-based sampling. The PHTC wanted to explore whether completely passive methods could be used to monitoring beluga and other marine mammals.

The project, designed in direct collaboration with the PHTC and community hunters, includes monitoring of marine mammals in two locations of local importance for marine harvesting. Hydrophones were placed in the water over a one-month period during peak beluga migration times. These underwater recordings were accompanied by local monitors recording their observations on field data sheets and through capturing images through cameras, video recorders, and drones. To date, this local expert and scientific collaboration has resulted in an increased understanding of beluga habitat use in Darnley Bay.

***2) Conservation through archeological and biological research, Seal River/Hubbard Point/Arviat, Manitoba and Nunavut***

For the last four years, Oceans North Canada has undertaken projects related to conservation of cultural and ecological resources in Western Hudson Bay. Very little effort has been placed on studying the Western Hudson Bay beluga population and the Inuit of the Kivalliq region of Nunavut, who have harvested beluga in this region for centuries, have a strong desire to protect this resource and the adjacent land.

This project has three parts: (1) satellite telemetry of beluga, (2) boat-based survey of summer beluga distribution, and (3) archeological surveys of two sites near the Seal River (Hubbard Point and a location on the north side of the Seal River). This research

relied on hunters and elders from nearby the communities of Arviat and Rankin Inlet who guided the research and provided valuable insight and advice. The archeological survey in 2014 was conducted in partnership with Inuit Heritage Trust and involved students from Tadoule Lake in northern Manitoba (a community that has a historic connection with western Hudson Bay coast) and Igloodik, Nunavut.

These projects have greatly increased scientific understanding of the largest summer population of beluga in Canada, and demonstrated the important connection between Inuit and the Seal River area. The research has helped provide information for the province of Manitoba to create a beluga management plan for the western Hudson Bay beluga population.

### ***3) Monitoring impacts of development, Lancaster Sound, Nunavut***

Over the last two years Oceans North has been working with the Mittimatalik Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) in Pond Inlet Nunavut and local community members to monitor ecological changes in the greater Lancaster Sound region. This work was developed in response to concerns from the community of Pond Inlet over changes associated with the Baffinland iron ore mine.

The work has two components – monitoring effects of shipping on the summering narwhal population and monitoring of ice at the Eclipse Sound floe edge in advance of proposed winter shipping. The first part of the monitoring program uses passive acoustic recording devices to determine presence of narwhal in the Milne Inlet area and reaction to ship traffic during the shipping season. Local hunters deployed and retrieved two devices in 2014 in Milne Inlet and four in 2015 in Eclipse Sound, Milne Inlet and Tremblay Sound. The second part of the program involves video monitoring of the Eclipse Sound floe edge before, during and after its break-up in late spring and early summer, by way of two autonomous time-lapse camera systems deployed on high lands on both sides of the eastern end of Eclipse Sound. Each system consists in an insulated box containing the camera and hardware powered by one battery and one solar panel. Equipment was brought on sites by snowmobiles in May, and recovered by boat and helicopter with the help of hunters from Pond Inlet.

Both projects in Nunavut are implemented through direct collaboration with local hunters and with the support of the HTO. The HTO has a desire to take on the acoustic monitoring as a community based monitoring initiative with the assistance of ONC.

### **Positive Outcomes of Community Involvement in Arctic Conservation**

In striving to follow the principles of Inuit involvement in Arctic projects, ONC has been able to carry out Arctic conservation while working directly with Arctic communities in Canada, to promote science- and community-based conservation of Canada's Arctic Ocean. As the examples of the ONC projects show, community interests and conservation goals support one another. There is sufficient common ground between conservation organizations and Inuit

organizations to form the basis of partnerships that promote common goals and provide room for additional benefits to each partner. An essential part of developing such partnerships is taking the time to understand the Inuit approach to conservation of their land and animals, to learn how to communicate with each other, to understand what matters to each partner and how a partnership can enhance everyone's well being.

---

### **Other Considerations**

In considering all of this, it is also important to build upon the successive Arctic Observing Summits; there are a number of best practices that have already been brought forward. Specifically, ensuring best practices work towards better policies and guidance.