

## **The Inuit Circumpolar Council input to the Arctic Environment Ministers Meeting October 11-12, 2018**

### ***Main Message:***

Meaningful involvement of Indigenous Peoples in all decision and policy making processes will strengthen research, resilience, mitigation and adaptation as well as ensure respect for and recognition of their distinct rights. Further, addressing the multiple challenges associated with climate change, biodiversity conservation, and pollution requires a holistic understanding of the interlinkages that exist within and between the health of people, animals, and plants; the condition of land, sea, and air; and the cultural fabric held together by language, cultural expression, and social integrity. This holistic view can only be achieved through bringing together Indigenous Knowledge and scientific disciplines through equitable collaborations.

### **1) Biodiversity Conservation**

#### ***Main Message (3-5 lines):***

People are part of the Arctic ecosystem, where Inuit culture and biodiversity are intricately tied. Biodiversity is supported through Inuit customary and cultural practices and use of biological diversity. Meaningful involvement of Indigenous Knowledge is crucial to gaining a holistic understanding of the Arctic and building the best available evidence-based information to support biodiversity conservation.

#### **Main Challenges:**

Although the United Nations has recognized that Indigenous Peoples care for 22% of the earth's surface, including an estimated 80% of the planet's remaining biodiversity<sup>1</sup>, current approaches to biodiversity conservation often omit Indigenous perspectives, concepts of conservation, and Indigenous Knowledge. This often results in decision making and/or policy with deleterious impacts due to limited information.

While there is growing awareness of the importance of Indigenous Knowledge, a continued top-down approach across institutions creates institutional inequities thereby inhibiting sufficient Indigenous involvement that can provide direction and crucial information to support biodiversity.

Biodiversity monitoring and assessment processes are often siloed. This siloed approach leads to a limited understanding of interconnected systems and/or cumulative impacts. An Inuit understanding of biodiversity is seen through a holistic lens (often referred to as a 'food security lens') which focuses on the connections between all components, such as the relationship between language and biodiversity. Resulting management practices and conservation actions are then reflective of an overall ecosystem as opposed to individual species.

#### **Best practice and proposal for common solutions:**

- Ensure and enhance the equitable engagement of Indigenous Peoples in all phases of monitoring and assessment programs (i.e. from designing to implementing to analyzing) recognizing that Indigenous Knowledge includes monitoring methodologies and evaluation processes.

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<sup>1</sup> World Resources Institute (WRI) in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, and World Bank. 2005. Securing Property and Resource Rights through Tenure Reform, pp.83-87 in World Resources Report 2005: The Wealth of the Poor – Managing Ecosystems to Fight Poverty. Washington, D.C.: WRI.

- Create intellectual and political space for Indigenous Peoples' equitable, effective participation in all phases of decision-making, policy development, and solution-oriented discussions to ensure they encompass concepts such as 'conservation through use' and understandings of culture as part of the ecosystem.
- Evaluate how international institutions may adapt across scales in order to adjust to this changing world. Adaptation includes creating equitable space for multi-knowledge and multi-disciplinary work, encouraging respect for and involvement and understanding of multiple concepts, such as the concept of conservation through sustainable use and implementing both top down and bottom up approaches.
- In Calls for Proposals, funding agencies should state the need to equitably engage (and provide funding for) Indigenous Peoples when doing biodiversity conservation research and/or other related activities in the Arctic.

## 2) Pollution Prevention

### ***Main Message (3-5 lines):***

A healthy ecosystem is central to Inuit identity, vitality and wellbeing, food security, and cultural sustainability. Indigenous Peoples are the most at risk of being exposed to and impacted by pollution and contaminants transported North, often originating from outside of the Arctic.

### ***Main Challenges:***

Contaminants and pollutants that have accumulated in the Arctic environment and compounded up the food chain have been a concern amongst Inuit and the international community for decades. Compared to southern populations, Inuit face greater risk of exposure to contaminants transported by air and water currents to the Arctic. New contaminants and pollutants pose increasing threats, for example, there is a limited understanding of the extent and full impacts that microplastics and other pollutants have within the marine environment and throughout the food web.

Furthermore, climate-related changes such as loss of multi-year sea-ice and thawing permafrost are leading to enhanced cycling of contaminants that may have adverse impacts throughout the food web and to drinking water. Many Inuit communities continue to rely upon drinking water from freshwater ponds, lakes, multi-year sea ice, and rain water.

Accumulative local pollution due to heightened human activity, and military legacy sites which continue to litter the Arctic, are an additional source of pollutants and contaminants.

Contaminant and pollution research at times is isolated to single species or selected parts of the ecosystem and lacks an understanding of the interrelationship that exists between the mental and physical health of humans to all other life in an environment.

Clear communication between Indigenous and scientific communities is at times challenging and may result in missed opportunities, research questions too narrowly focused, misunderstandings of findings, and a lack of understanding of cumulative impacts.

Contaminants are being produced and released at an alarming rate and national and international legislation to prevent pollution and the release of contaminants is currently insufficient. Existing national legislation and international agreements are too slow to react to the rapid changes and quantity of contaminants being released into the environment.

***Best practice and proposal for common solution:***

- Inuit hold a unique knowledge of their homelands and offer valuable collaborative partnerships with scientists to identify key questions and research needs to increase our understanding of pollution and contaminant impacts.
- The coordination of information is crucial to moving forward in this rapidly changing environment. With this understanding, we stress the need to increase and coordinate research on microplastics, pollutants, contaminants, and their impacts throughout the Arctic food web. Research must be accomplished swiftly and directly inform policies and decision-making at local, regional, national and international levels.
- Regulatory policies and international agreements need to be focused on preventing the release and transfer of contaminants and pollutants into the environment.
- Regulatory policies that protect Arctic freshwater systems from pollution and unsustainable depletion must be advanced, recognizing that clean water is a human right.
- Inuit can provide monitoring and observation data/information continuously across seasons. Information collected may also include scientific measurements. Providing resources and training may aid in providing economic resources and capacity to a remote community while collecting necessary data/information to be used at a community, regional, national, and/or international scale. Through the development of observation/monitoring programs that recognize and bring together both Indigenous Knowledge and science, there is an opportunity to better understand regional and global dynamics of Arctic change.
- Research projects must be based on equitable partnerships between Indigenous and scientific communities. Communicating scientific results back to Inuit communities regarding potential risks in a timely manner reduces disparities of access to information and knowledge, prevents causing alarm, and results in opportunities to effectively utilize information in decisions across scales.
- In Call for Proposals, funding agencies should state the need to equitably engage (and provide funding for) Indigenous Peoples when doing pollution prevention research and/or other related activities in the Arctic.

### 3) Climate Change

#### **Main Message (3-5 lines):**

Inuit are on the forefront of rapid changes occurring within the Arctic and are the first whose livelihoods, health, security, and rights are impacted. Inuit have survived living in harsh Arctic conditions through innovative adaptation strategies and sustainable management practices that continue to be implemented along with the development of new strategies to address climate change. These strategies and practices can inform assessments, decision-making, and policy across national and international scales.

#### **Main Challenges:**

Amongst the multiple changes experienced today are shifts in food web dynamics, changes in phenology, thawing permafrost, increase in storm surges, increase in precipitation, changes in near shore currents, increase in sea surface and freshwater temperatures, loss of multi-year sea ice, and change in sea ice thickness and coverage. These changes are intricately connected and impact flora, fauna, and human populations. Inuit who have lived in this environment for thousands of years are, for example, facing adjustments to hunting patterns and food processing which connects to shifts in economic resources and costs.

Addressing climate change requires baseline and evidence-based information to inform adaptive decision-making and policy. Often research and monitoring initiatives, used to create and build upon baseline information, lack a holistic approach that is necessary to bring together multiple knowledge systems and scientific disciplines. Furthermore, these initiatives are often driven by top-down generated questions and inquiries, limiting the use of the information gathered, and often lack the ability to work across cultural, geographic and temporal scales.

While Indigenous Peoples are on the forefront of the changes that are occurring, Indigenous communities and knowledge are oftentimes not equitably or effectively engaged in the development of monitoring and research initiatives.

There are challenges in information and data sharing across geographic scales and limited accessibility to technological tools that may be used to enhance the collection and sharing of information and data.

#### **Best practice and proposal for common solution:**

- Under best practices it is necessary to recognize that human rights are at risk from a changing Arctic environment, including threats to Inuit culture, food security, and health and safety. Research and policy need to reflect the human rights elements embedded in climate change. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>2</sup> provides principles to aid in ensuring this practice.

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<sup>2</sup> *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, GA Res. 61/295 (Annex), UN GAOR, 61st Sess., Supp. No. 49, Vol. III, UN Doc. A/61/49 (2008) 15.

- Understanding interconnections and cumulative impacts is particularly important when considering climate change research in the Arctic. Climate change research must consider and reflect the interconnectedness of the Arctic ecosystem, inclusive of Peoples. For example, cryosphere research has important connections with food security, mental and physical health and emergency response and preparedness. Overall, the health of one animal cannot be considered without considering the health of another and all its diverse interrelationships.
- There is a need for institutions to adapt in order to provide the best available knowledge and information for effective decision making. This approach requires the transformation from top-down structures rooted in Western frameworks and moving into equitable and meaningful engagement of Indigenous Knowledge. This adaptation requires bringing together Indigenous Knowledge and science to provide a holistic understanding of the Arctic that interacts across local, regional, national, and international scales in bringing together knowledge, policy, and practice to strengthen resilience and adaptation within the Arctic.
- Many Inuit communities hold unique knowledge [in remote areas] that external researchers or decision/policy-makers often do not interact with. Through the development of observation/monitoring programs that recognize and bring together both Indigenous Knowledge and science, there is an opportunity to understand regional and global dynamics of Arctic change.
- In order to build baseline information/data and monitoring that addresses multiple user needs at multiple geographic and temporal scales there is a need to look at how information/data is categorized, accessibility of information, and technological tools that may be used to aid in enhancing networking capabilities across cultural, community, regional, national, and international scales.
- More emphasis is required on developing innovative technological tools to aid in the gathering of information and addressing challenges faced today. For example, the expansion of current tools such as broadband connectivity can aid in gathering and sharing data/information.
- In call for proposals, funding agencies should state the need to equitably engage (and provide funding for) Indigenous Peoples when doing climate change research and/or other related activities in the Arctic.