



Yup'ik and Cup'ik Past and Current Managers of Salmon Focus Group: Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources¹

FOCUS GROUP MEETING SUMMARY REPORT

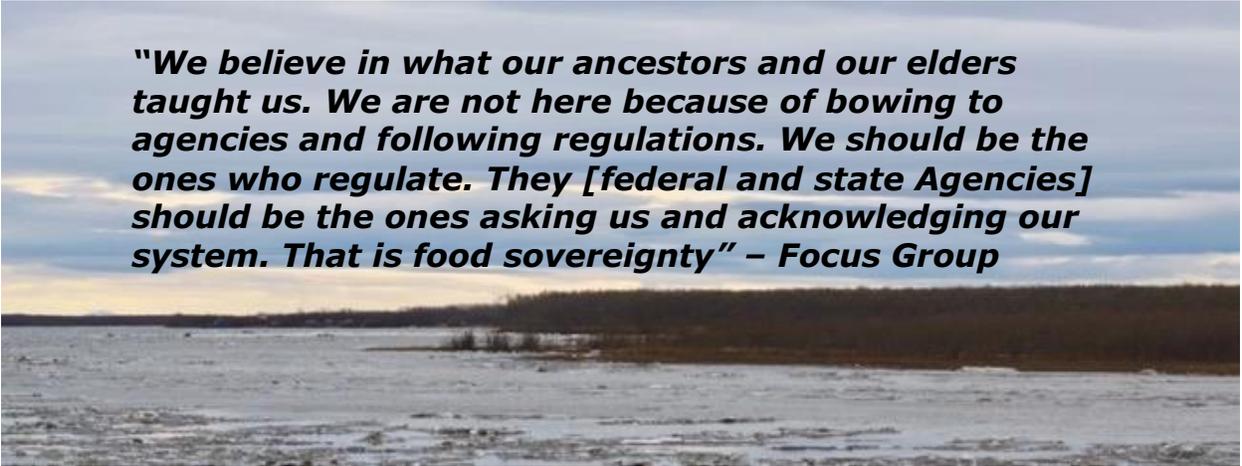


People in photo listed on page two. Photo: Inuit Circumpolar Council

Food sovereignty is the right of Inuit to define their own hunting, gathering, fishing, land and water policies; the right to define what is sustainable, socially, economically and culturally appropriate for the distribution of food and to maintain ecological health; the right to obtain and maintain practices that ensure access to tools needed to obtain, process, store and consume traditional foods. Within the Alaskan Inuit Food Security Conceptual Framework, food sovereignty is a necessity for supporting and maintaining the six dimensions of food security.²

¹ This work is supported through a National Science Foundation grant (grant no. 1732373). No opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. Additional travel support was provided by the Ocean Conservancy.

² Inuit Circumpolar Council-Alaska. 2015. Alaskan Inuit Food Security Conceptual Framework: How to Assess the Arctic From an Inuit Perspective. Technical Report. Anchorage, AK.



"We believe in what our ancestors and our elders taught us. We are not here because of bowing to agencies and following regulations. We should be the ones who regulate. They [federal and state Agencies] should be the ones asking us and acknowledging our system. That is food sovereignty" – Focus Group

Photo: Carolina Behe

Citation

This report reflects the knowledge and perspectives of Indigenous Knowledge holders attending the focus group meeting. The report should be cited as: Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska. 2018. Yup'ik and Cup'ik Past and Current Managers of Salmon Focus Group: *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance - Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources*. Anchorage, Alaska.

The focus group meeting was facilitated by Carolina Behe, assisted by Shannon Williams. Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough, as a member of the project team, also attended the focus group. This report has been prepared by Carolina Behe and Shannon Williams.

Quyana!

Quyana to the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) and the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) – specifically Quyana Jennifer Hooper and Mary Peltola for all of your support and assistance in the organizations and implementation of this workshop. Quyana to Sarah Mutter (AVCP Staff), for taking notes throughout the entire workshop. Quyana to Joann Andrew and Charlie Charlie for providing translation between Yup'ik and English and for your valuable contributions. Quyana to the Orutsaramiut Native Council for providing meeting space, administrative support, and for welcoming us to Bethel. Quyana to all of the participants for your time and valuable contributions to this important project.

Front Page Photo: From Left to Right. Top Row – Tim Andrew, Charlie R. Charlie, Benjamin Lazano, Golga Fredrick, Ralph Nelson, Walter Morgan, Baylen Toots, Yago Jacob. Second Row – Carolina Behe, Shannon Williams, Joann Andrew, Vera Metcalf, Mary Peltola, Lucy Post, Charlene Erik, Alice Grace Julius, Natalia Brink, Sara Mutter, Dalee Sambo Dorough. Third Row – Robert Lekander, Mike Williams Sr., James Aiagiak Charles, Arthur Lake, Phillip K. Peter, James Nicori, Moses Owen, William Charlie Brown.

About the Focus Group Meeting

On May 9, 2018, the Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska hosted a focus group meeting as part of the Inuit-lead project, *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance: Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources (FSSG)*. The goal of the focus group was to bring together Inuit who have been, or are currently, engaged in management of salmon (or other marine life), to:

- Explore current co-management structures, policies related to our food sources and decision-making pathways, and
- Consider ways to improve and enhance the management and co-management of our food and related habitats in contrast to the existing ways.

The discussions at this meeting will further inform the Inuit led project *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources*³ (FSSG). This report provides a summary of the topics discussed and information considered during the focus group meeting.

The meeting, which was held at the Orutsaramiut Native Council multi-purpose building in Bethel, Alaska, was attended by 23 Indigenous Knowledge (IK) holders (referred to as participants throughout the report). Quyanana to all of those who were able to attend:

- Alice Grace Julius (Goodnews Bay)
- Arthur Lake (Kwigillingok)
- Baylen Toots (Mekoryuk)
- Benjamin Lazano (Kongiganak)
- Charlene Erik (Chefornak)
- Charlie R. Charlie (Tuntutuliak)
- Golga Fredericks (Nunapitchuk)
- James Aiagiak Charles (Tuntutuliak)
- James Nicori (Kwethluk)
- Joann S. Andrew (Bethel)
- Lucy Post (Kongiganak)
- Mary Sattler Peltola (Bethel)
- Mike Williams, Sr. (Akiak)
- Moses Owen (Akiak)
- Natalia Brink (Kasigluk)
- Phillip K. Peter (Akiachak)
- Ralph Nelson (Napakiak)
- Robert Lekander (Bethel)
- Timothy Andrew (Bethel)
- Vera Metcalf (Nome)
- Walter Morgan (Lower Kalskag)
- William Charlie Brown (Eek)
- Yago Jacob (Napaskiak)

³ Information on this project can be found on the ICC Alaska web page or through the following link (access July 18, 2019) - https://iccalaska.org/wp-icc/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1001_FSSG-SUMMARY-AND-UPDATE.pdf

About the Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources (FSSG project)

The FSSG project is a follow up to our 2015 report [How to Assess Food Security from an Inuit Perspective: Building a Conceptual Framework on How to Assess Food Security in the Alaskan Arctic](#). Through workshops, focus group meetings, research, and analysis associated with that project, a central theme emerged: that food security and food sovereignty were undeniably linked. It was concluded that without food sovereignty, we cannot realize food security. The key recommendation derived from that report is to analyze management and co-management structures within Inuit Nunaat and to understand how those governing frameworks need to be modified and improved to achieve Inuit food sovereignty. The FSSG project aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of existing and emerging frameworks supporting Inuit self-governance by examining the current management and co-management of Arctic marine food resources.

The three key objectives of the project are:

- Synthesize and evaluate existing frameworks for Inuit management and co-management of marine food resources presently reflected in law, policies, and legal authorities in the United States and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of Canada;
- Evaluate how existing Inuit self-governance is operationalized by examining four co-management case studies focused on marine resources that are aimed at ensuring food sovereignty, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social, political, and institutional parameters affecting implementation of key legal frameworks:
- Assess how Inuit self-governance supports food security by evaluating food sovereignty objectives against the existing legal and structural frameworks and their effective implementation and outcomes

The work is structured around four case studies – salmon and walrus in Alaska and char and beluga in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. These case studies are used as a pathway to a larger, interrelated discussion about management and food sovereignty.

The project is made up of a team that includes the Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska, The Inuit Circumpolar Council Chair, and the Environmental Law Institute. Other partners include the Association of Village Council Presidents, Kuskokwim River Inter Tribal Fish Commission, Eskimo Walrus Commission, Inuvialuit Game Council, and the Fisheries Joint Management Commission. The project is guided by an Advisory Committee made up of the project partners and further advised by the Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada.

The final report is scheduled for completion by March 31, 2020.



Chinook Salmon in the Smokehouse. 2010. Photo: Mary Peltola.

Focus Group Structure

Through the FSSG project methodology development (developed in collaboration with the project partners), it was decided to hold the focus group meetings in conjunction with each partner's annual meeting.

In line with the project methodology, this focus group meeting occurred in conjunction with the Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fisheries Commission (KRITFC) 2018 Annual meeting. The focus group meeting was planned and organized with two of the project partners, the KRITFC and the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP).

Yupik members of the KRITFC attended the meeting. The members of the KRITFC have been selected by their respective tribal councils to represent their communities within the KRITFC. The KRITFC and AVCP aided in identifying additional Yup'ik and Cup'ik Indigenous Knowledge holders who have been strongly engaged in harvesting and/or preparing salmon. In expanding the attendance of the meeting additional people from a larger geographic scope within the Yukon-Kuskokwim region were able to add voice and important perspectives to the discussion.

Throughout the day we promoted a flexible and relaxed environment. Discussions were held through both collective and small break out groups. Breaking into smaller groups provided an opportunity to have in-depth discussions and provided support for some who felt less comfortable contributing within a larger group. For example, during one of the smaller breaks out groups, all women attending the meeting gathered in a distinct group. This supported women to speak specifically about points that they are most knowledgeable and to go into deeper discussion on those points.

The meeting was facilitated using guiding questions that were informed by the ICC Alaska food security report, [How to Assess Food Security from an Inuit Perspective: Building a Conceptual Framework on How to Assess Food Security in the Alaskan Arctic.](#) and further refined by the FSSG Advisory Committee.

As with all gatherings, we had lots of food and laughter throughout the day!

"We want our people to continue to exercise the way they have lived for thousands of years. We should be the ones to regulate. They are the ones that should be asking, pleading, for co-management"
– Focus Group Participants



Photo: Carolina Behe

Report Summary

The below provides a brief summary and general overview of the discussion held throughout the meeting. Though this section is broken into bolded headings, all headings are interrelated. For example, when speaking about the need for adaptive management strategies, one must also consider traditional Inuit management practices, the health and well-being of people and animals, variability in weather, and many other related components.

Key Themes/Concepts Discussed

The meeting was facilitated using guiding questions under key themes/concepts:

- Personal Experiences in gathering food for you, your family, for your community
- Consultation processes as it relates to and impacts your food gathering activities
- Decision-making pathways
- Indigenous Knowledge and Research questions
- Information accessibility and knowledge sharing
- Taking care of our homelands and waters, and what tools are used
- Impacts of regulations on the wellbeing of animals, water, land, air, and Inuit (i.e. culture, physical and mental well-being)

Key Focus Group Meeting Findings

While the meeting was facilitated using guiding questions under key themes/concepts, the discussions were further focused and refined by the participants. Key themes/concepts and findings include:

- The rapid rate of changes
- Relationships with law enforcement and other government officials
- Challenges with the co-management system and regulations
- Positive changes occurring within the co-management system
- Holistic approach to management
- Inuit traditional rules and roles
- Women-specific rules, roles, and traditions
- Recommendations to move towards Inuit Food Sovereignty



Photo: Jacki Cleveland

To begin the discussions, participants were asked to share their experiences over the past year in gathering food for themselves, their families, and for their communities. Much of this discussion naturally leads into the other topics to be discussed and holds strong references to changes that go back fifty plus years and to changes associated with climate change.

Over the past 50 years many changes have occurred within the interconnecting topics of food security, culture, politics, economics, technology, infrastructure, education systems, and the environment. Many of the changes discussed during the meeting came from forced changes and assimilation policies, such as children being sent to boarding schools and imposed regulations. Participants stressed the negative impacts of many of these changes, including impacts to health and on the passing of Indigenous Knowledge to younger generations about the harvesting and preparation of traditional foods.

Additionally, participants stressed that “climate change is impacting us”. The concerns shared are not just because things have changed or are changing – in this environment, change has been constant and we have always adapted. Today, the associated concern centers on the rapid changes occurring and lack of adaptability of federal and state policies and regulations.

Below is a brief listing of changes that participants shared. It is important to note that all of these changes are interconnected and require deeper discussion to fully understand the cumulative impacts and potential decisions that Inuit must make to adapt.

- Unpredictable weather patterns
- Increasing air and water temperatures
- Increased frequency of storms and storm surges
- Loss of permafrost
- Changes in wind and water currents
- Changes in timing of river and sea ice formation and break up
- Changes in salinity levels
- Changes in precipitation (increase in rain and less snow in some areas)
- Changes in animal behavior, timing, migration, and related patterns

- Decrease of some animal populations in some areas (i.e. ptarmigan, tom cod)
- Change in migration and placement of some plants and animals to new areas (i.e. moose and bears moving toward the coast and berries moving inward)
- Shifts and adaptations in harvesting activities in relation to following the weather and animals – related to seasonality changes

In response to many of these changes, it is necessary for people to adapt. As one participant shared, “Our way has changed, our system has changed...”. Participants further shared that in light of the changes occurring, “...the regulations don’t make sense.” For example, it is important to dry fish when the weather is conducive for drying fish. Participants further stressed that, “...the animals have seasons. All of the fish have their schedule, they are not going to wait for us. They have tributaries to spawn [in]”.

Participants further shared concern with changes that highlighted human behavior and activities –

- shipping activities
- large scale commercial fishing and associated by-catch
- increasing human population
- increase in pollution/waste management

“Our ancestors used to talk about June as a drying month for the fish that are gathered for the food that will sustain [us] for the whole winter. Another thing that June doesn’t have is flies. [Begin drying] just before the flies start flying around. That was our lesson what we were taught...If we are going to go fishing all the fishes have their schedules these four species are all scheduled to arrive on these rivers and these four species are not going to wait for us. I was told they will not wait for us to get them because the time to get them is their season...And again these fish have tributaries and a place to spawn.” – Workshop Participant



Salmon drying. Photo: Jacki Cleveland

Consultation and Decision-making pathways

Upon reflection of consultation and decision-making pathways, participants focused on the deep connection that we have to the environment that we are a part of. Participants stressed that Indigenous Knowledge has worked for thousands of years to place humans in harmony with the environment and resources. The value of this knowledge is not adequately acknowledged or supported within policies or utilized to inform adaptive decision-making. As one participant shared, there is a need for "...us as Indigenous and original peoples of this land to have an equal say in the regulatory language and not always [be] restrictive from practicing our way of life".

Participants identified several ways that our food sovereignty is impeded by the state and federal government consultation processes; what information is used to inform decision-making; and within current regulations.

Such challenges, obstacles, and frustrations include:

- Need for stronger consultation processes that treat us as partners with a voting say in the decision-making
- Some regulators do not acknowledge the fact that we have been successful in managing our resources for thousands of years
- Dismissive behavior and disrespect toward Indigenous Knowledge
- Laws and most scientific research reflect western values, not Yup'ik and Cup'ik (Inuit) values
- Federal and state laws and regulations that govern our harvesting activities to feed our families is confusing and hard to navigate
- Imbalance in representation on federal and state management boards and advisory groups
- Lack of equity in state and federal government processes, decision-making, and research activities
- Lack processes and mechanisms for true involvement of Indigenous Knowledge
- Discrimination against our way of life and culture

Participants explained that these concerns demonstrate disrespect toward them, the animals, land, and waters. This concern is reflected in consultation processes described as people being told what is going to happen, decisions made prior to meetings, science valued above our knowledge, being limited

to an advisory role or to giving a testimony to those that lack knowledge of our culture. Participants described examples of presenting Indigenous Knowledge to a federal or state management boards, and being met by disrespectful body language (rolling eyes, slouching in chair, closed eyes, as if they were asleep), huffing in frustration, or being interrupted.

The need for communication, with efforts to building relationships and partnerships are needed within the consultation processes. It was emphasized that communication is part of respect.

In thinking specifically about decision-making pathways, participants shared feelings of being controlled by the federal and state government and stressed that lack of processes for the inclusion of our Indigenous Knowledge and values contributes to limiting their equitable involvement in decision-making. Further, involvement in the decision-making process is hampered by unequal representation on management bodies at both the state and federal level.

Often, there are very few Alaska Native representatives on any given decision-making board and they are easily out-voted by other representatives - examples include the State Board of Fish or the Federal Subsistence Board. There is a need for processes that provide equitable voice and weight to Native caucuses and peoples.

"I think they are at a point right now the state and federal government, I hope, are finally realizing that we are here for good, they are not going to get us to go away."- Focus Group Participant

"Our resources are the same. We all want to save the resources. If we work together, we can do it."- Focus Group Participant

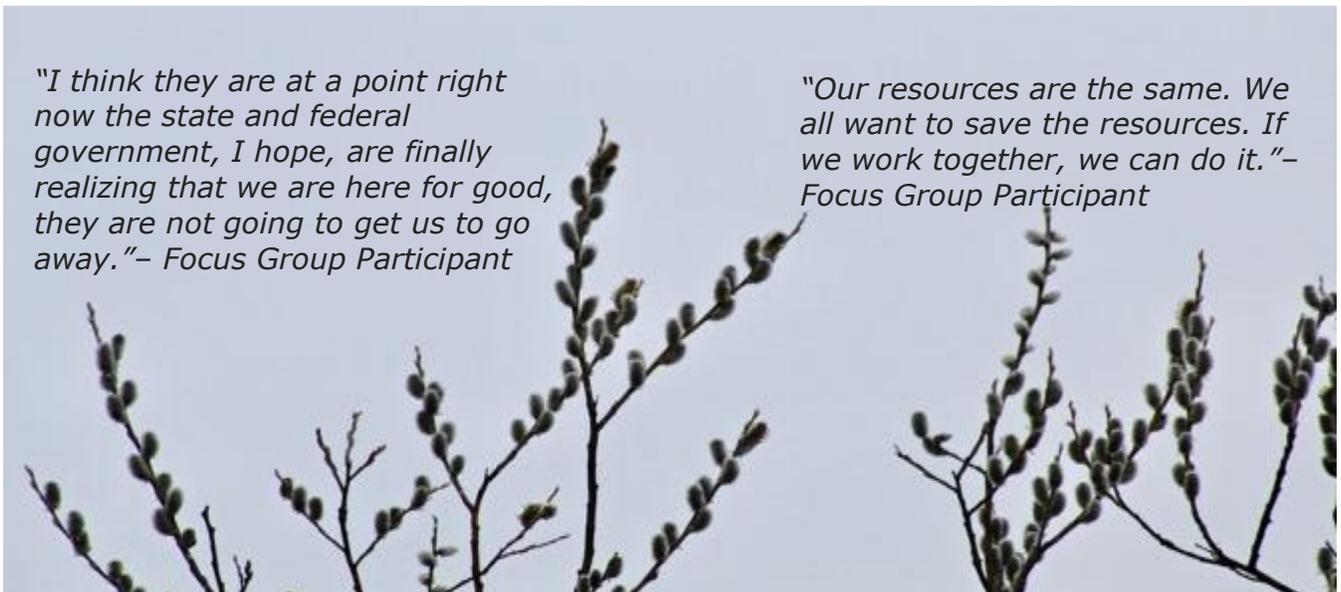


Photo: Carolina Behe

Additionally, these boards are operated under a system and culture that differs from our own. Participants noted that many decisions are ultimately driven by commercial industries which have representation and funding to put them in a place of power. Examples were provided of people being restricted in taking salmon to feed their families and asked "...to sacrifice much of our [cultural] ways, while the [large scale] commercial fishing industry is legally able to waste salmon (disrespecting the animal)...", as reflected by the large amount of salmon taken through by-catch.

"Our ancestors provided all of the information, the path, and all of the things necessary for our people to survive to continue."- Focus Group Participant



From left to right – Phillip K. Peter, Sr., Moses Owen, Walter Morgan. Photo: Carolina Behe

Also, in relation to decision-making pathways, participants voiced frustration about the confusing nature of the federal and state management systems - noting that the policies and management processes are often hard to navigate. It is often challenging to know who to direct our concerns to and at what level. This issue is further exasperated by lack of communication between federal and/or state agencies and within the agencies. Of equal concern, are the challenges of keeping track of multiple policies and regulations that are imposed and/or conflict with our knowledge.

Overall, in considering consultation and decision-making, participants emphasized the need to share our knowledge and values to inform decision-making and policy. In order for the sharing to be meaningful, managers/regulators, policy makers and those making decisions have to listen and work hard to understand the complexities of our Indigenous Knowledge.

Indigenous Knowledge and Equity

As shared above, participants heavily stressed the importance of our knowledge. As one participant shared, "...We all know the weather, we all know our rivers around us. We are the experts. Our knowledge of oceans and ice [and] of the animals - the mistakes our ancestors have taught us. All of these teachings have not changed from our ancestors." While another participant shared, "We have credibility. We have faith in our Indigenous Knowledge. Our knowledge goes way back. We know what pieces to look for...".



From left to right – Golga Fredrick, Sarah ?, Arthur Lake, James Aiagiak Charles, William Charlie Brown, Baylon Toots. Photo: Carolina Behe

Participants described concerns about the impact on the environment when not using our knowledge. Our knowledge holds a holistic understanding of the world – an understanding of the interconnectedness (relationships between) between humans, the water, air, and land, all animals and plants are central to our knowledge. Participants described the importance of a holistic approach to management, commenting that western scientists and managers often do not consider the connections between all species.

Within the discussion about what knowledge is used to inform decision-making and research, participants identified single species approaches as

one of the main shortcomings of western science and federal and state management. One participant described single species management, commenting: "We are compartmentalizing everything; putting lines where they don't belong. Lines don't belong in the natural world. They don't allow freedom of movement so that everything will survive." Another participant shared, "...It should be talked about as one environment. Salmon does not know who is regulating or what boundaries are".

Participants further observed shortcomings of western science data collection techniques and knowledge of the animals. For example, in relying on fish counting data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, participants have discovered that there is a large amount of guesswork that goes into their counting (through estimates). It was stressed that much more information is needed to understand animals. One participant also indicated that weirs (used to count fish) disrupting water flow can negatively impact the fish.

Participants noted that scientists and lawmakers do not want to accept Indigenous Knowledge as legitimate or true information because it is unwritten and does not follow the same methodologies as western science. Participants described encounters of being dismissed and asked if they, "have science to support that..." (Workshop Participant. 2018) when trying to share their Indigenous knowledge.

Participants also shared a few positive changes and success stories that are occurring in the co-management world. Some participants described a shift in the way that agencies are responding to Indigenous Knowledge – these changes were closely tied to individual scientists and/or agency representatives.

Participants described some advances within the development of the Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fishery Commission (KRITFC). For example, as opposed to holding a meeting where agency representatives and scientists provide a series of western science oriented presentations in a classroom type of delivery, the commission now determines who the presenters are and hold meetings sitting in a circle. A less structured agenda with a more wholistic approach is also used.

KRITFC is also building partnerships with specific scientists and managers. As one participant shared, "A positive example is the influence that five Native fishermen have on the federal management of Chinook subsistence fishing. Within the KRITFC there are 33 commissioners. Four of the commissioners are elected annually to serve as in-season managers. The KRITFC's Elder Advisor and the four in-season managers consult weekly, and often multiple times a week before and during the Chinook salmon run to advise U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on escapement goals, harvest targets, gear-type, and times of closures and openings. Indigenous Knowledge is shared, respected and incorporated into management decisions".

A representative from the Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) shared a successful example on potential listing of walrus on the Endangered Species list. The representative shared that after working tirelessly to advocate for inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge within the USFWS' reports, and guiding the agency to include Inuit hunters in the research and sampling process, that they have seen some progress.

"We are supposed to know about all of that system [federal/ state government and western science] and how to deal with it, but then they don't come and look at ours" – Focus Group Participant

"There is a lot of faith and confidence that we have in our knowledge because we are here, we live here. We see it year after year. That is the hypothesis of science: you test over time. That is how come their data series go way back. Our data series too, go way back. Because we live here." – Focus Group Participant



Nora Nelson (10 years old), cutting salmon belly strips to dry. Photo: Mary Peltola

While there are some examples of partnerships between researchers and Indigenous communities, there is a feeling that these examples are too few and need to become the norm. A lot of work is needed to move to equitable partnerships. Participants shared the need for community driven research and being willing to aid scientists in advancing their work and understanding through collaboration. Participants felt that there is a need for processes that support the equitable inclusion of their Indigenous Knowledge, for a co-production of knowledge, and for trust and respect.

Existing Regulations, Impacts, and Adaptation

Many participants described how difficult, disheartening, and emotional it has been to go from a life relatively free of restrictions to one that is excessively restricted by both state and federal entities. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that the regulations put in place by state and federal agencies do not reflect Indigenous Knowledge or our values. For example, the regulations are rigid and inflexible.

Our communities have adapted through centuries of change. Specifically, participants shared that through following the animals and the weather, they have adapted changes in animals timing, weather, influx of house flies, etc. As one participant explained: “when the decisions are not being made locally when that system allows for waste to occur... My fish [the] last couple of summers spoiled because of timing allowed to fish.” The regulated time to fish was not conducive to weather needed for processing the fish.

Participants indicated that existing regulations stop people from living the life they were born to live. Participants highlighted the fact that rigid regulations which limit hunting and fishing to just a few days each summer limits the passing down of Indigenous Knowledge to the younger generations. Children are not able to participate as often or as much in meaningful traditions. As one participant put it “If we could only fish two days in the month of June, for a young kid, one summer is a long time. That is a huge lesson that is lost.”

Participants further shared concerns that the young people today think of the restrictions as normal because they have known nothing else. They

feared that the normalizing restrictions will create generational disconnect and challenges for youth in understanding their cultural identity and their connections/relationships with the environment. As one participant commented: "I see our children are in a state of confusion right now. I have been telling my kids, my grandkids and my children we hunt and live off the land. And yet when it comes time to fish, who is saying I can't fish?"

Participants further discussed other values demonstrated within the decision-making pathway, that feels in conflict and harmful to the environment. For example, there is concern about management decisions and regulations that often emphasize individualism (a western value) which devalues tribal and community rights. One participant shared, "They say we are supposed to focus on ourselves, but we were not brought up that way. Further within the discussion about regulations participants shared concerns about the tenuous, and at times, paternalistic relationship that communities have with game wardens. They noted that there is often a deep cultural rift between law enforcement officials and communities.



Van Kapsner. First catch ptarmigan. 2013.
Photo: Mary Peltola

A few participants compared their relationships with law enforcement and the feeling of being heavily regulated to being tied up like a dog, being blocked, or being fenced in. They described a history of holding fear at hearing law enforcement or game warden planes flying into a community or area where harvesting is occurring.

Participants further shared that the terminology often used to describe their activities as hurtful. For example, using the term 'overharvest' to describe harvesting activities to feed families is disrespectful, dismissive of the

relationship that people hold with the salmon, and the Yup'ik and Cup'ik laws that people live by. One participant commented: "We do not waste or overharvest and if we do, it weighs on us."

Women's Traditions

During the focus group meeting, participants were asked to organize into small break out groups. While most of the break out groups focused on the same themes that were discussed in the larger discussion group, one group was comprised of only women who were asked to discuss some of the traditional rules and roles that applied specifically to women. The focus was on the special role that women have in our traditions and our communities.



From left to right – Mary Peltola, Joann Andrew, Dalee Sambo Dorough, Vera Metcalf, Lucy Post, Charlene Erik, Natalia Brink, Alice Grace Julius. Photo: Carolina Behe.

While the women agreed that the specifics of many traditions varied from village to village, participants shared a common understanding of the meaningfulness of these rules and roles. Traditions specific to women that were discussed by participants in the women's break out group include the following:

- Women's role in the preparation and sharing of harvested animals
- The handling of hunting equipment
- Women have to respect themselves and respect the power that they have
- Fasting when a mother passes away
- Avoid using harsh tones with children
- Avoid defending their children, let them learn to defend themselves
- People take on the characteristics of their namesakes
- Traditions surround pregnancy and miscarriages
- Sharing
- Women are equal to men – both skills of men and women are needed for both balance and survival



Margaret Dillon Fitka with seal oil being cold rendered. Photo: Mary Peltola

Participants noted that some of these traditions are being forgotten, ignored, or written off as superstition. However, the rules have stood the test of time and participants explained that elders taught them that following rules and traditions affects personal health as well as environmental and community health and well-being. One participant explained: "I will be affected by how I listen or how I don't abide by them [traditions and customs] ... my actions will affect the land and to the water and to the sky...We can affect the fish, make them disappear. The berries, the weather." For example, if an animal is disrespected during processing, the animal will not carry messages for other animals to give themselves to the hunter. In this way the women's actions impacts if a hunter is a good hunter.

Importantly, participants shared that, "...settlers taught women that they are beneath men. But that is not the Yup'ik [or Cup'ik] way. Women play a strong and equitable role within taking care and respecting all within the environment."

Yup'ik and Cup'ik Rules/Practices/Protocols

Participants shared that they do not traditionally use the word management to describe caretaking and stewardship of life, land, water, and air around them. It was explained that these rules/practices are deeply engrained. As one participant shared, "The rules are not just your way of being...it is the relationship with everything." These rules/practices/protocols emphasize a strong sense of community, responsibility, and respect.

In discussing Yup'ik and Cup'ik rules/practices/protocols it was shared that there are no hunting and fishing seasons - there is hunting and fishing in all seasons: "We have a season with fish four times a year: spring, summer, fall, and winter. That is what we depended on, year after year. It never

changed. And that is what the people lived on, no matter what part of the year it is.”

Below is a summarized list of the rules/practices/protocols discussed:

- Be respectful to what is available to you and it will come back to you
- Do not disrespect the land, water, air, plants, or the animals
- Do not waste; use all parts of the animal; be conservative
- Fasting helps create abundance
- Animals do not wait for you; do not sit around while food passes by
- Share; Share your first catch with elders; share with widows; make sure that all are provided for
- Take care of the land and the land will take care of you
- Give wholeheartedly without expecting anything in return
- Include youth in hunting and fishing; celebrate youth involvement
- Everyone in the family has a role
- Do not try to make money from subsistence
- Be quiet and humble and live in harmony;
- Respect yourself, your neighbor, and your enemy
- Focus on caretaking, not fighting; Do not argue or fight over the animals
- Let the elders eat first
- Elders should share their knowledge; youth should take their knowledge from them
- Have patience and listen
- Follow the seasons, follow the animals
- Take animals when they give themselves to you
- It is important to take animals at the right time



Association of Village Council Presidents Yupiit Piciryarait Museum. Right Picture - Noel Polty, Pilot Station, Plaque Mask, Circa 1960's. Left Picture - Ellam Yua Hanging Ornament, Unknown, original collection, Circa 1950's. Photo: Carolina Behe.

Throughout the course of the day, participants shared recommendations and ways they feel we can move towards Inuit food sovereignty. Key recommendations discussed include:

- Work together; be unified
- Continue to gather collectively; meetings with all Inuit
- Place focus on educating the younger generations and include youth in meetings
- State of Alaska and federal government policies to support formal participation and equitable partnership with Tribal governments
- Move beyond Indigenous input through advisory councils/committees and focus on equitable partnership through true co-management
- Enhanced capacity and authority of Indigenous regional organizations
- Document and sharing positive stories
- Increase communications
- Community developed consultation practices and policies
- For state and federal management practices and western science to move away from single species approaches
- Need for community driven research and monitoring
- Need for pathways for the equitable inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge
- Adequate funding support needed for equitable inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge
- Educate policy makers, scientists, managers, and regulators about our way of life
- Publish information for our people (about our own rules/policies and positive stories)
- Be drivers of communication efforts
- Embrace our sovereignty

Participants repeatedly noted the need to collectively work together to create a united front in order to take step towards Inuit food sovereignty. As one participant commented: "Look how powerful they [all of the tribes in the region] are if only they would put their minds together and work together to get something that we want." Additionally, participants recommended that we continue to gather collectively as a way to build relationships and share ideas: "This is part of what builds us up by identifying who we are and connecting us to our land and our way of life."

Several participants discussed the importance of educating youth, further recommending that youth be invited to meetings such as these. Born from this recommendation, ICC Alaska facilitated a Youth, Elders, and Active Hunters and Gatherers workshop in Bethel in February 2019. The Youth, Elders, and Active Hunters and Gatherers workshop provided a space for Inuit youth, elders, and adults from Alaska and Canada to learn from each other and have meaningful discussions about Inuit traditional values.

Participants recommended increased regional and tribal authority. They recommended increasing our knowledge of the existing tools and pathways that can help to increase our sovereignty: “when we start to understand them, we start to exercise our rights.”

Many participants recommended that success stories like those shared from the EWC and KRITFC should be shared widely amongst Inuit. Participants indicated that those stories help to spread hope and happiness and re-invigorate and inspire our people.

Finally, participants stressed the need to take ownership of our sovereignty. Noting that we are sovereign, we need to act sovereign.

...give freely. Because in return, the tundra will come back at you ten-fold, it will come back in abundance. - Workshop Participant



Photo: Carolina Behe

Conclusion

This focus group provided an opportunity for in depth discussions about the co-management system, Inuit food sovereignty, challenges and obstacles to achieving food sovereignty, and ways to move forward. This report provides a brief summary of the many rich discussions that took place. These discussions will continue throughout the project and will be shared in the final Food Sovereignty and Self Governance report. The final report is scheduled to be completed by March 31, 2020.



Sockeye Salmon in the smoke house. 2014. Photo: Mary Peltola