



Inuit Past and Current Managers of Marine Resources Focus Group¹: Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources



Photo: Katirvik Cultural Center Staff

Food sovereignty is the right of [All] 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

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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. ² Access July 18, 2019 - https://iccalaska.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1001_FSSG-SUMMARY-AND-UPDATE.pdf

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. Inuit Past and Current Managers of Marine Resources Focus Group Meeting: *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance - Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources*. Anchorage, Alaska.

The meeting was facilitated by Carolina Behe, assisted by Shannon Williams. Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough, as a member of the project team, also attended the meeting. Report prepared by Carolina Behe and Shannon Williams.

Igamsiqanaghalek/Quyana!

Quyana to Lisa Ellana and staff at the Katirvik Cultural Center for providing space for the meeting and for hosting a potluck for all the participants. Quyana to Mary David and Kawerak Inc. for supporting the preparatory sessions and the actual meeting. Igamsiqanaghalek to Vera Metcalf and the Eskimo Walrus Commission for welcoming us to Nome and her help with the meeting preparations.



Photos: Carolina Behe. Photos taken at the Potluck hosted by the Katirvik Cultural Center.

Introduction

On March 30, 2018, the Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska hosted a meeting to bring together Inuit who have been or are currently engaged in management of marine resources 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.

Overall, discussions focused on our interpretation of traditional and federal management laws, how the laws are being implemented, and what may be missing from existing federal laws.

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 Inuit Past and Current Managers of Marine Resources Focus Group.



Photo: Shannon Williams

The meeting, which was held at the Katirvik Cultural Center in Nome, provided a strong opportunity to share thoughts and perspectives from across Inuit Nunaat. Twelve Indigenous Knowledge holders from throughout Alaska and one Indigenous Knowledge holder from the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) participated in the meeting.

While three Indigenous Knowledge holders from ISR had planned to attend, two had to cancel due to illness. Understandably, the resulting discussion largely reflects the perspectives and knowledge from Alaska.

James Nicori (Kwethluk)
Robert Lekander (Bethel)
Mary Sattler Peltola (Bethel)
Charles Brower (Utiqagvik)
Vera Metcalf (Savoonga)
Iver Campbell (Gambell)
Elmer Seetot, Jr. (Brevig)

John Lucas, Jr. (Sachs Harbor)
George Noongwook (Savoonga)
Kenneth Kingeekuk (Savoonga)
Willie Goodwin, Jr. (Kotzebue)
Orville Ahkinga, Sr. (Little Diomed)
Sylvester Ayek (King Island)

The Inuit Past and Current Managers of Marine Resources Focus Group meeting was facilitated using guiding questions that were informed by the ICC AK 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.



Photo: Shannon Williams

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 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.

Key Meeting Findings

While the meeting was facilitated using guiding questions, the discussions were further focused and refined by the participants. Key themes that were discussed included:

- Inuit rules and traditional practices
- Language and self-governance
- Inuit Agreements
- Climate Change
- Adaptability
- Conflicts of interest
- Challenges with current co-management systems
- Power dynamics
- Perceptions of Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science
- Paternalism
- Inequality in co-management
- Impact of material bans (seal skin and walrus ivory)
- Steps toward improved co-management
- Indigenous human rights and international instruments



Photo: Shannon Williams

Meeting 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 and interdependent. For example, when speaking about the need for adaptive management strategies, one must also consider traditional Inuit management practices.

Inuit Rules and Traditional Practices

For thousands of years, Indigenous Knowledge alone was responsible for successful management of Arctic resources. And while we do not refer to our knowledge of how to live in harmony with the resources as “management,” we know that our Indigenous Knowledge is vital to all co-management and decision making processes.



Photo: Shannon Williams

Throughout the course of the meeting, many discussions revolved around the traditional Inuit rules and practices that have been handed down for generations. These rules and practices have allowed us to thrive in the Arctic since time immemorial as part of the ecosystem. Participants highlighted the fact that substantial bodies of Indigenous Knowledge have remained relevant and have proven adaptable and lasting, guiding us throughout the many changes that we have experienced in the Arctic.

Traditional rules and practices shared by participants throughout the day included the following (listed in no particular order):

- Never waste
- Only take what you need
- Follow the cycles of the animals
- Respect elders
- Take care of each other
- The more you give, the more you'll get back
- Never argue about the animals
- Don't talk about the animals when you are going to be hunting that day because they might hear you
- Don't make plans for the meat before you go out hunting
- Take time - have patience
- Never brag about what you are going to catch
- Leave animals alone when they are having young ones
- If you take care of the land, it takes care of you
- Never count the fish coming into the river
- Use the resources that are given to you by the creator; if you use the resource, it will come back and multiply
- Pay attention to all of the pieces that make of the environment - Holistic management

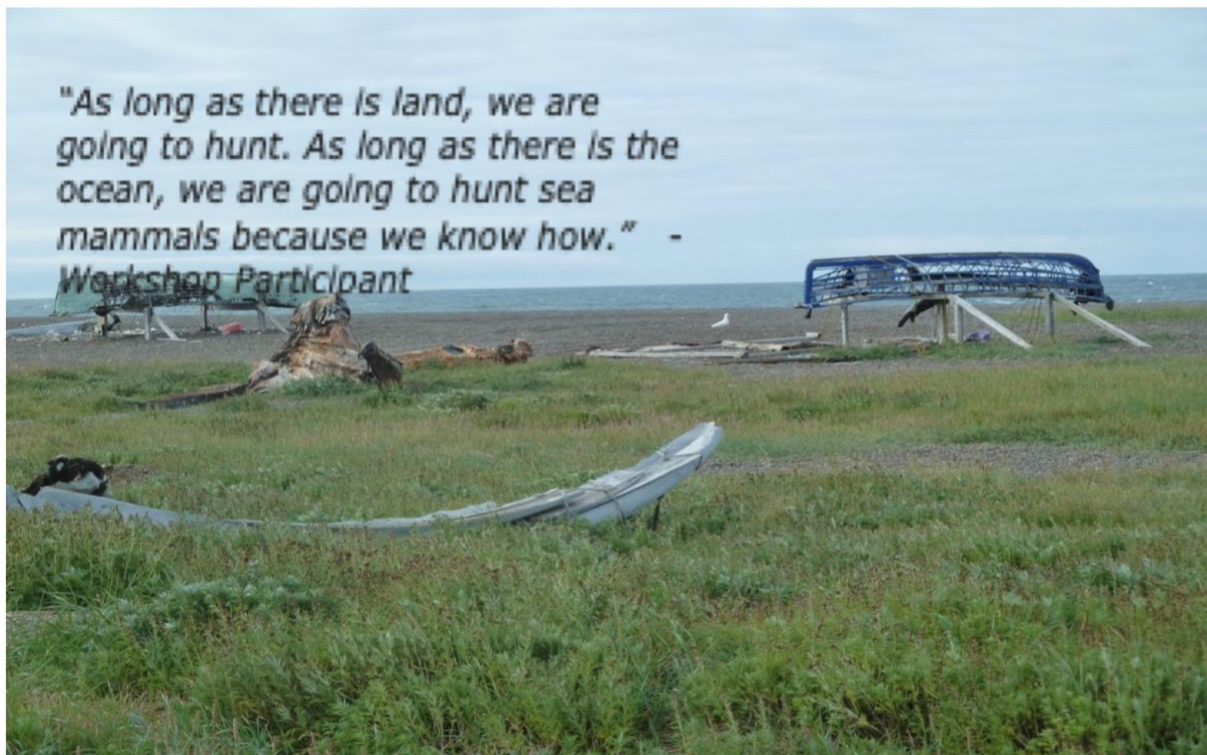


Photo: Carolina Behe

Participants highlighted the fact that 'western' education has nothing to do with skill in the management of resources. Nor does formal education have anything to do with our relationship with the animals, plants, land, and water.



Photo: Shannon Williams

Participants stressed that there are many cases, in which federal and state recognized management structures are at odds with Inuit rules and practices. Under our rules and practices, the law is in the hands of the communities, rather than the federal or state government. "Infractions" are mainly dealt with through social pressures rather than legal penalties. As one participant explained, a main difference between our rules and practices and federal or state management is that the basis for compliance with the federal and state systems is the physical world, whereas the basis for compliance with our way is a sense of morality. The participant added that if people do not follow traditional rules and practices, they tend not to be as successful in their harvesting.

An example of traditional rules and practices working to benefit our resources is the role of Umialik (whaling captain) in North Slope whaling communities. The Umialik (boat owners and leaders) hold power in the communities. If someone does something unacceptable, they hold council with the Umialik who hears their case. This system is still practiced as a way to regulate bowhead whale harvests.

A key aspect to food sovereignty is being able to utilize our practices within a co-management system. This includes conflict resolution. Our ways of addressing conflict are rooted in cultural respect. Participants raised examples of conflict within management meetings that resulted in tension

and caused arguments over an animal. Indigenous knowledge tells us that if we argue about an animal, the animal will not make themselves available to us. This is a way of disrespecting the animal. So, for example, arguing about salmon can cause sporadic populations. Because of the conflict caused by commercial fishing and the impact that it has to fish stocks, Inuit in the ISR no longer allow commercial fishing to take place in their waters.

Language and Self Governance

Language is an integral part of our culture and speaks to our relationships and understandings. The use of our language in explaining complex concepts is important to supporting our food sovereignty.

Participants shared that miscommunications can occur in co management, highlighting that there are many management-related words which cannot be directly translated into our languages. There are also many English words that do not make sense within the context of Inuit culture.



Photo: Shannon Williams

Upon the recommendation of one participant, a number of participants took time to brainstorm ways in which the term food sovereignty could be translated from English into the various Inuit languages and dialects spoken by attendees. It was felt that having a series of Inuit language translations for food sovereignty would help to make the definition stronger and would empower Inuit.

Some participants elected not to translate the word, indicating that the concept is not translatable to their language because the concept of food sovereignty doesn't exist in Inuit language or culture. All participants agreed that there is no direct translation and terminology to describe food sovereignty (or management). However, some initial ideas included words and phrases which roughly translate to the following:

- Taking care of children/everything
- Caretaker or gatekeeper
- Taking care of living things
- Holding the responsibility to take care of

A few phrases were considered in different Inuit dialects:

Aflengakista, Aflengakistet (Saint Lawrence Island Yupik)

Aulukstai (Yup'ik)

Pikasiuq, Isamaloon, Isamalootit (Iñupiaq)

Ultimately, it was decided that it would be more appropriate to consult with elders in various communities to determine a working translation.

Examples of Inuit Agreements

Participants described several instances in which Inuit have acted independently of the state and federal government to implement their own management decisions. Main examples of independent management decisions provided by participants during the focus group include: the implementation of the Inuvialuit-Inupiat Polar Bear Agreement



Photo: Shannon Williams

and Inuvialuit-Inupiat Beluga Agreement (agreements between Inupiat in Alaska and the Inuvialuit in Canada), the implementation of wildlife ordinances on Saint Lawrence Island, and the self-imposed moratorium on beluga whale hunting in the Kotzebue area.

Participants described the long process that eventually lead to the land conveyance after which the people of Saint Lawrence Island own the land outright. Participants from Saint Lawrence Island explained that they are able to own the land because they followed the advice of their elders who told them to never accept money from the federal government or anyone else. The elders of Saint Lawrence Island stressed that once money is gone, it's gone—but land is forever. The communities of Gambell and Savoonga opted out of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and as such they have never had a regional or village corporation. Because they own the land, they are now able to practice their own management for the most part. And while federal laws still exist, they have formed their own ordinances based upon their Indigenous Knowledge and traditional rules.



Photo: Carolina Behe

Climate Change

Climate change and food sovereignty are strongly interlinked. As the world looks for ways to adapt to and mitigate impacts of climate change, we are on the forefront of the changes occurring. Our communities have quick, adaptive, and holistic approaches based on Indigenous Knowledge. At the same time, we strongly want partnerships with scientists to further address arising questions. Such partnerships aid in enhancing our collective understanding of changes occurring and contribute to the development of the most holistic responses.



Photo: Shannon Williams

Throughout our discussions, many of the changes occurring were highlighted, including:

- later freeze up
- shorter and milder winters
- increased frequency of storms
- warmer water temperatures
- unpredictable winds, snow and ice conditions
- increased presence of invasive species
- harmful algae blooms
- change in animal behavior
- shifts in animal migration

These changes can drastically impact lifestyles and pose many safety risks. For example, later freeze up times and reduced sea ice can shorten hunting seasons for marine mammals due to access issues. Changes in sea and river ice formation can cause travel hazards, such as unstable ice. Low water levels decrease salmon spawning habitat and can prevent access due to shallower channels.

Over the past years, some animal migration, health, and behavior has changed. Changes are attributed, in part, to climate change, impacts of

regulations, and increased industry activities such as shipping. The changes in water temperatures, salt levels, oxygen levels, water and wind currents are all understood to contribute to cumulative impacts that affect the entire food chain.

Participants shared observations of marine mammal health concerns, including skin issues, excessive sea lice, unhealthy livers and kidneys, and behavior-indicated stress. Animal health is directly linked to our food security. An example of such marine mammal health concerns is the case of the large walrus die off in the summer of 2017 possibly due to an Unusual Mortality Event.

Warmer water temperatures can also cause changes in salmon behavior, and has caused them to congregate in lower, cooler areas making them harder to harvest. And warmer temperatures and other factors can cause changes in their routes of travel. Participants noted that they have seen far fewer king salmon, but have noticed more red salmon coming into areas where kings used to be.

Changes to typical weather patterns can also cause issues with food preparation. Additionally, late salmon runs do not coincide with the best drying weather. At this time, smoking fish can be challenging due to dampness affecting the quality.

Inuit Adaptability Versus Rigid Government Management

Several participants noted that many of the specific changes listed above, particularly climate change, was predicted by elders. Elders predicted shorter, milder winters, long stretches of warm weather, changes in weather, and rising sea levels. We know that these changes have occurred historically and that changes are going to continue to happen. Participants highlighted the fact that adaptability has always been a great strength of our culture. Participants further stressed that Inuit are prepared to adapt alongside the fish and animals. As one participant commented, "our people will face that challenge and live through it."

Many participants commented that western science and government management structures are less adaptable. For example, changes in the seasons and the weather requires innovation in terms of food preservation. Because drying fish spoils quickly in bad weather, our Indigenous Knowledge tells us to follow the fish and to harvest when the weather is right. However, due to rigid



Photo: Shannon Williams

regulations, that is not a possibility. Some changes in management are achievable, such as a shifting of the whaling season into winter. However, processes like that often take a long time as laws and regulations hamper the rate of innovation and adaptation that is possible within traditional Inuit management practices.

Participants commented that the general attitude towards climate change exhibited by western scientists, wildlife managers, and the media tends to be far more negative and alarmist than the Inuit attitude towards climate change. While climate change intimately and profoundly affects Inuit ways of life, participants indicated that a faith in our ability to adapt is ultimately stronger than a fear of the coming changes. As one participant commented, “we are not dooming and glooming, we are looking for opportunities, we’re observing. That’s how we adapt. That’s how our ancestors adapted.” At the same time, the federal governments, within both Canada and the United States, have a responsibility to respond with urgency to address the negative impacts occurring.

Conflict of Interests



Photo: Mary Peltola

Participants shared the impact of 'competing for resources' with outside entities that often have high finance backing for lobbying. Inuit food sovereignty is often impeded by these competitors which include large-scale fisheries, animal rights groups, sports hunters, the research and tourism industries, and those using aircraft to collect beach-found walrus and mammoth ivory.

For example, sports hunting and fishing regulations, which are set by the state, were implemented over 40 years ago. Because the state does not comprehensively recognize Tribes as governing bodies, Inuit had very little involvement in the decision making process that went into the setting of those outdated regulations. Participants noted that even in the present day, there is just one Alaska Native representative on the Board of Game and that person is more often than not, out-voted or out-numbered by agency people. During the focus group, participants commented on the need for those regulations to be revisited, noting that due to climate change the seasons that were put in place so long ago are no longer appropriate. For example, there have been issues with sports hunters hunting too early and altering the migration of the caribou herds. As a few participants shared, the increased popularity in sports hunting has put extra stress on easily-accessible areas like Bethel or the Dalton Highway.

Participants discussed the problems associated with sport hunting tourists who fly in from far away to catch the biggest bull moose or biggest king salmon that they can. As one participant noted, "We know that the big bulls are breeding stock... We are not after trophy animals." The meat from larger animals is not the best meat to eat – it is not tender. Indigenous Knowledge tells us that taking smaller animals allows the fittest animals to reproduce.

It was noted that these issues with sports hunting and fishing largely do not exist in the ISR. Due to the Northwest Territories Wildlife Act⁴, continual consultation with communities must take place and recommendations must be observed when it comes to sports hunting, fishing, and outfitting.

Challenges with Current Co-Management System

Participants discussed some of the difficulties we face in the current co management system. Through discussions, participants identified several ways that our food sovereignty is impeded during the processes of government consultation, scientific research, and in dealing with regulations that are already in place. Such challenges, obstacles, and frustrations included:

- Rules and regulations that conflict with our Indigenous Knowledge
- Challenges in communicating with others who hold different values, do not understand our way of life, and/or do not understand or value our Indigenous Knowledge
- Challenges and frustration with holding the burden of proof (having to prove our positions and knowledge)
- Challenges with always having to operate under western management rules without our rules and practices being respected
- Manipulation or lack of upholding laws meant to protect our rights
- Miscommunication due to difference in languages and cultural practices
- Inequity in funding and decision-making
- Inequity in representation on co-management boards or advisory groups

Participants indicated that accepting regulations and management decisions which conflict with Indigenous Knowledge is often an emotional experience. One participant commented that it is particularly hard to know that there are resources that we are not allowed to take—such as minke whales, humpback

⁴ Wildlife Act for the Northwest Territories. 2018. Accessed July 18, 2019.

https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/sites/enr/files/resources/wildlife_act_plain_language_summary_january_2018.pdf

whales, and gray whales—even though our ancestors made use of these animals for thousands of years. To be barred from all of those things separates us from an aspect of our culture and causes inevitable loss of Indigenous Knowledge. Participants described the feeling as having their hands tied.

Participants also shared frustration that at times we have been held to blame for declining populations of some animals. For example, migratory birds have always been the first resources that would come into the



Photo: Mary Peltola

area in spring. The birds we harvested in Alaska are a tiny fraction of the birds that are being taken. Many non-Indigenous Peoples were taking much larger numbers of birds for commercial sales in other parts of the United States. One participant described the feeling of distress that resulted from that situation: “it still hurts me that they said the Natives up here were taking the eggs, that’s how come the birds were disappearing and there wasn’t enough.”

Participants also expressed frustration that our practices and input are often not taken seriously until they are adjusted to be more westernized. One example of this is the land conveyance of Saint Lawrence Island. Participants commented that the people of Saint Lawrence Island held knowledge of their land ownership. The ownership was not recognized by the federal government until it was formalized in a western way. One participant who attended the land conveyance signing commented, “It was a big signing ceremony. And all of us said gosh, wow, if you put it on a piece of paper, it makes it real.”

However, putting things in writing does not always have the same effect. Participants shared that concepts and laws that are in place to support Inuit often only exist on paper. One participant explained that food sovereignty is one such concept, noting even though food sovereignty is a term that we have been hearing for several years now, it is not often seen in practice: “When we try to utilize it [in speaking with] people who manage our food sources, like Fish and Wildlife, they don’t recognize it. So, I think it is just on paper, that’s all.”

Participants highlighted the unequal representation of Alaska Natives in co management bodies. Often, the number of government representatives far exceed the number of tribal representatives. An example was given by one participant of the Migratory Bird Council, which has 11 members who act as Alaska Native representatives, but those 11 individuals are only allowed one vote between them. Another example provided was the Federal Subsistence Board, on which there are three Alaska Native representatives and five representatives of the Federal government. The participant who provided this example went on to note that the agency people are often individuals who know very little about Alaska and were just transferred here to work. In contrast, Indigenous Knowledge holders have a “continuum of knowledge and perspective” but are still generally outvoted. Additional examples were provided of management councils, such as the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, which do not have a tribal or Indigenous seat at all.

Power Dynamics - Control, Intimidation, and Power

Participants commented on the undertones—and sometimes overtones—of intimidation that they feel from wildlife managers and law enforcement, highlighting the imbalance of power that often pervades the co management and consultation process. Overall, participants agreed that within Alaska the government (both state and federal) is reluctant to give up any control to move toward an equitable relationship or genuine partnership.

It was noted that game wardens and law enforcement often arrive with little information and a misguided attempt to treat everyone the same, no matter where they are stationed. One participant also identified pride as a factor

that drives continued mismanagement of certain resources. The participant noted that although the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has seen our management work, they continue to be reluctant to amend their management systems. For example, the state has seen that fishing from the first salmon run and allowing the second run to pass is an effective strategy but they refuse to change regulations which allow early fishing. Regarding that example, the participant commented, "I started thinking that maybe they don't want to admit that we are right and they are wrong."

Perceptions of Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science

Participants commented that our Indigenous Knowledge is often misunderstood and undervalued compared to western credentials like academic degrees. This lack of value for our knowledge has caused managers and researchers to discount or undervalue our contributions. Participants feel that, in the end, the words of scientists are perceived as stronger than Indigenous Knowledge in the eyes of the government.



Photo: Shannon Williams

As one participant commented, "for years, our testimony before the various boards and commissions that do regulation was taken as anecdotal—because we didn't have a college degree, what we said wasn't the gospel's truth." Participants noted that they often did not feel decision-making entities view them as being on the same level. They discussed that it is difficult to "prove" that they know just as much or more than scientists. In such scenarios, we often feel pressured to step out of our own culture and behave in a way that is more like the outside managers: bragging or listing accomplishments or credentials.

Participants additionally stressed that researchers often do not create space for Inuit to feel comfortable sharing our knowledge. Noting that at times the discussion of traditional rules does not seem appropriate in the context of consultation or co-management meetings. They explained



Photo: Carolina Behe

that some outside regulators are often dismissive when Inuit co-managers bring up Indigenous Knowledge that conflicts with what the researchers are doing.

Participants further explained that the very basis of western science and western wildlife management sometimes goes against Inuit values. For example, traditional rules such as never count fish and never argue about the resources were disregarded when scientists installed weirs in the river. The scientific analysis of information is often singular in focus (focusing only on one aspect). While the information and analysis are important, it lacks a holistic understanding. Participants indicated that scientific findings often only show part of the story.

To improve and move toward equitable relationships, participants felt that there is a need for greater respect for and recognition of our Indigenous Knowledge and pathways for the involvement of our knowledge in co management decision making processes.

Walrus Ivory Bans

Participants discussed how bans on selling handicraft items with animal materials such as walrus ivory, fossilized ivory, and seal skin have negatively affected Inuit artists and communities and overall food sovereignty.

It was agreed that the ivory ban has caused unnecessary stress on our communities. Artists are now limited in which materials they can use and, in some cases, can no longer make certain types of art or handicrafts. This diminishes the ability to earn income within communities with few to no job prospects.

Participants highlighted that the income brought in by arts and handicrafts is not supplemental for most, but is instead used to buy basics and necessities. While many artists have tried to find ways around using marine mammal products, instead using muskox horns in place of ivory, for example, participants commented that it is disheartening to see the loss of certain artistic skills. One participant also noted that to not use walrus ivory is wasteful. This goes against Inuit rules and practices.

Indigenous Human Rights

One of the Principal Investigators, Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough, took time during the focus group to describe and explain many of the international developments that affirm and support Indigenous human rights.



Participants discussed how these developments can be used as tools to further Inuit food sovereignty and self-governance. Many of the declarations and international covenants that were reviewed during the focus group contain clear language that directly addresses barriers to self-

determination that Inuit face. A number of participants agreed that more knowledge of the international instruments and developments will empower our communities and provide tools to counter laws and policies that stifle our management and co-management, and advances our human rights. This discussion was closely tied to the discussion about the impacts of

international interests and campaigns that impact our way of life (i.e. campaigns to stop the sale of walrus ivory and ban on seal fur sales in some places). At the request of the participants, a list of international instruments was distributed for them to share with their communities and to further explore ways for them to be used.

Steps Towards Better Co Management

During the focus group, participants discussed some of the various steps that Inuit have taken towards improving co-management and consultation processes. Many of these improvements involve the employment of researchers locally or the implementation of research guidelines.

One participant shared the following example of a system developed by Inuit in Kotzebue where all researchers are asked to include an Indigenous Knowledge component in their studies. If a researcher doesn't agree, the study can be denied. Another participant shared that a similar system has been implemented in Utqiagvik, where visiting scientists are asked to sign a protocol agreement before conducting their study. The agreement states that a presentation on findings must be provided for the community. And within the ISR, communities are able to approve or deny every study that takes place in their region and have opportunities to provide feedback throughout the lifespan of projects. It was also noted that many Inuit-run entities, such as the North Slope Borough and Kawerak Inc., employ biologists and other scientists which allows Inuit to guide research and creates direct access to information.



Photo: Shannon Williams

These systems not only work to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in research, but can also help to lessen survey fatigue and give our communities more opportunities to define and influence the research that is occurring.

Participants agreed that the Inuvialuit Final Agreement and the government structure in the ISR in Canada is an advancement towards Inuit food sovereignty and self-governance. In accordance with the IFA, consultation regularly takes place between the Canadian Government and Inuvialuit management bodies. The local Hunters and Trappers Committees and the regional Inuvialuit Game Council are the main co-management bodies which represent Inuvialuit perspectives in wildlife management.

Delving deeper into the discussion about what it will take to develop a true co-management structure that supports Inuit food sovereignty, participants identified issues with funding. Funding, lack of funding, and who controls funding can often further exacerbate the lack of balance within a co-management system. For example, if the government controls the budget, they are able to control how, when, and why that budget is used. Participants stressed that a true co management structure would need to have adequate funding to support activities and information gathering that is directed by us.

Conclusion

This meeting provided an opportunity for in depth discussions about co-management, Inuit food sovereignty, challenges and obstacles, and ways to move forward. This report provides a brief summary of the many rich discussions held. These discussions will continue on throughout the project and will be shared in the final FSSG report. The final FSSG report is scheduled to be completed by March 31, 2020.



Photo: Carolina Behe. Members of the FSSG Advisory Committee meet the day before the Focus Group Meeting – Inuit Past and Current Managers of Marine Resources.