We would like to summit the following focus group summary report to aid in the discussions under Theme 3 - Observing in Support of Indigenous Food Security and Related Needs. This report is the direct reflections of discussions with members of the Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee about Food Sovereignty and Self Governance.

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. 2017. Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee Focus Group: *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance - Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources*. Anchorage, Alaska.

INUIT

Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee Focus Group: Food Sovereignty and Self Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources[1]

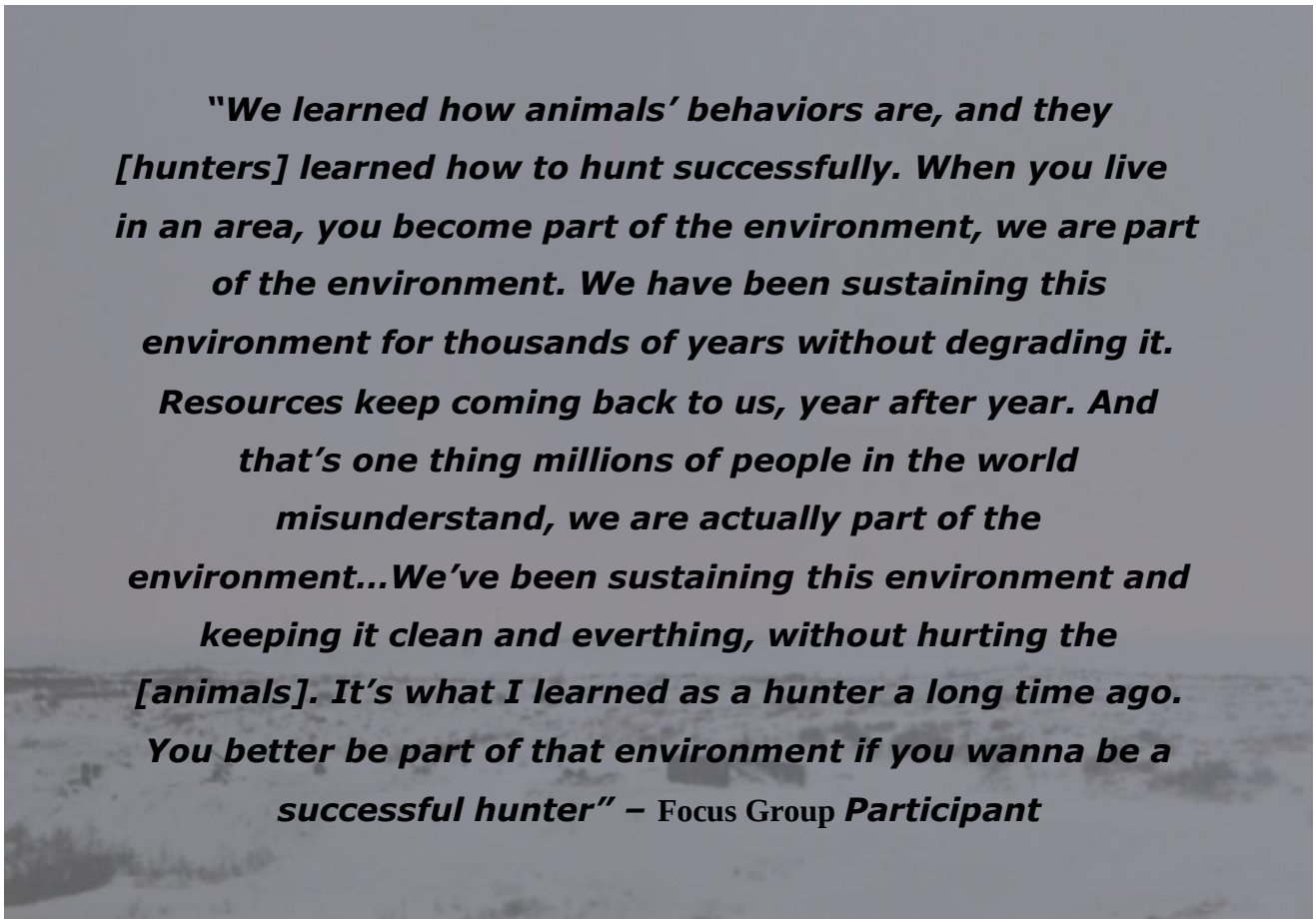
Focus Group Meeting Summary Report

Photo: Savoonga Tribal Council Staff

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, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

[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.



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The focus group meeting was facilitated by Carolina Behe, assisted by Shannon Williams. Report prepared by Carolina Behe.

Igamsiqanaghhalek!

Igamsiqanaghhalek to Vera Metcalf for all of her hard work and assistance in organizing the focus group meeting! Igamsiqanaghhalek to the Tribal Council for providing meeting space, support, and for welcoming us to Savoonga!

About the Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee Focus Group Meeting

On February 22, 2019, the Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska (ICC AK) facilitated a focus group meeting with the Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee as part of the Inuit led project, *Food Sovereignty and Self Governance - Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources* (FSSG).

The focus group participants included Indigenous Knowledge (IK) holders from the Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee, the EWC Director, and the Savoonga Tribal Council President. Through this workshop Indigenous Knowledge holders discussed co-management structures, policies and decision making pathways surrounding the management of walrus (and other food sources), and ways of moving toward Inuit Food Sovereignty.

This report provides a summary of the information discussed during the Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee focus group meeting.

Eight Indigenous Knowledge holders (referred to as participants within the report) attended the focus group meeting. Carolina Behe (project lead for ICC Alaska) facilitated the focus group meeting. Below is a list of the workshop participants:

Vera Metcalf – EWC Director
Paul Rookok, Sr.
Roy Waghiyi
George Noongwook
Chester Noongwook
Larry Kava
Mitchell Kiyuklook
Delbert Pungowiyi

Photo: Maasingah Nakak

The focus group 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.

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.

Introduction

This brief summary provides a general overview of the focus group meeting discussions and is not intended to be a complete review. Though this section is broken into bolded headings, all headings are interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible. For example, when speaking about the need for adaptive management strategies, one must also consider traditional Inuit rules/laws/practices.

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 the Arctic and what tools are used
- Impacts of regulations on the wellbeing of animals, coastal seas and water, Inuit

Photo: Carolina Behe

Key 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:

- Changes occurring
- Legal reviews, understanding the history, and accountability
- Politics and lobbying across scales
- Inuit laws/practices
- Values
- Language
- Enforcement
- Indigenous Knowledge
- Sources of Indigenous knowledge
- Pollution and Shipping

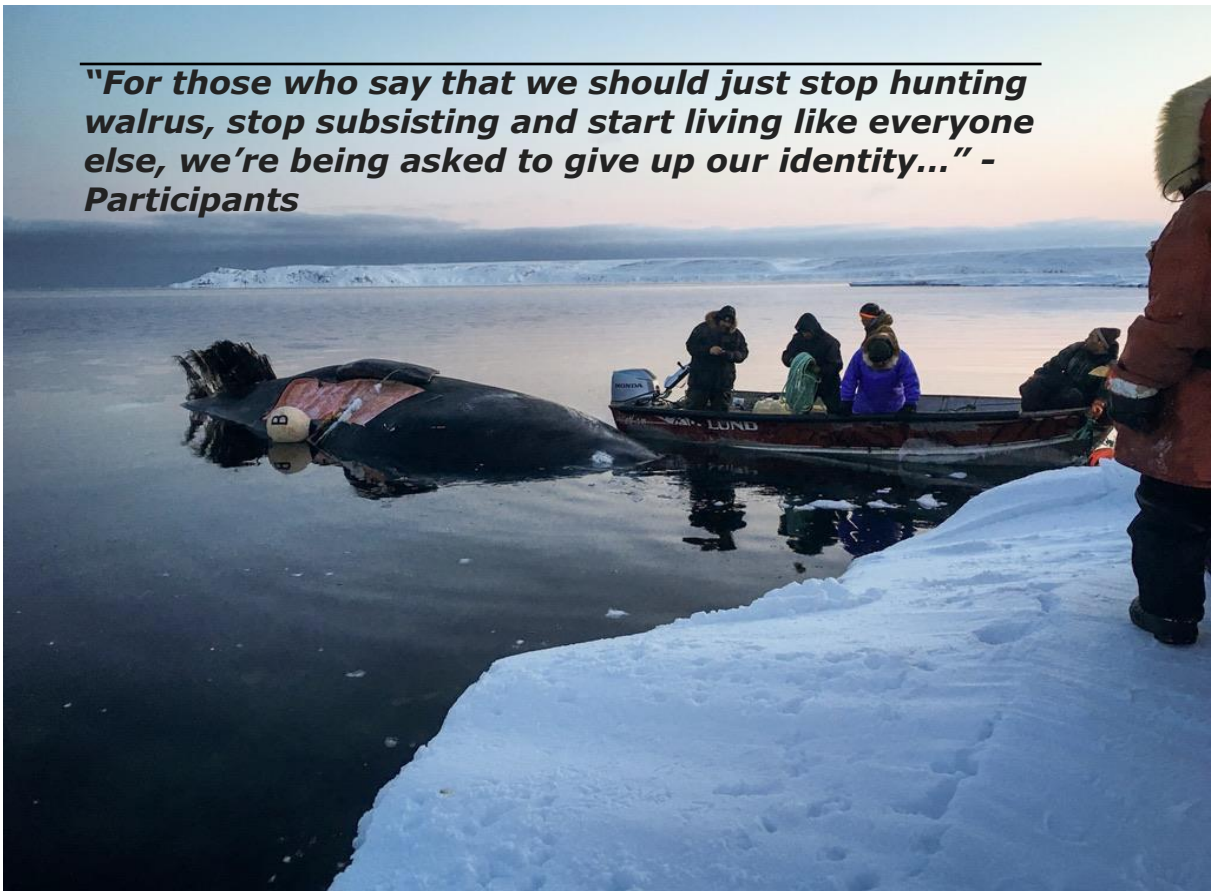

Photo: Cerene J Seppilu

On Personal Experiences

To begin the discussions, participants are asked to share about their experiences of 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 reference to climate changes and overall changes being experienced.

Through this discussion participants stressed the importance of marine life for food, for clothing, and, as one participant expressed, "…to make you happy when you get a marine mammal." The happiness felt is related to the hunter's relationship with the animal, to the animal giving itself to the hunter, and to providing for the community. Participants further shared the importance of never wasting any part of the animal, because it is so important as "…it takes care of a lot of people" (Focus Group Participant. 2019).

Below is a brief summary of changes that participants shared in the brief discussion. It is important to note that all of these changes are interconnected and require deeper discussion to fully understand the cumulative or compounded impacts and potential Inuit decision-making to adapt to the changes.

- No ice or very thin ice
- Change in frequency of storms (related to sea ice coverage)
- Last year (2018), there was no shore fast ice
- Shorter winter (sixty years ago, people relied on nine months of nice cold winters with lots of ice, now winters last 3 to 3.5 months)
- For a few years, there was no shore fast ice. This resulted in walrus staying in the water and some calving in the water.
- Arctic cod are not around (normally under the shore fast ice)
- Toxic Algal Blooms affecting food webs
- Change in animal migrations (associated with change in ice, water temperatures, change in wind and ocean currents)
- Increase in shipping and impacts of shipping on the marine environment
- Increase in pollution

Participants noted that this year was the first year they were had shore fast ice in a couple of years. One participant underscored that the ice is important for the safety of people and for the marine life and it influences the animal's migration patterns. A participant explained,

> "When the ice began to retreat, the migrations [animals] started going north. The water currents started flowing south to north during April. All these marine mammals catch a ride on the current. Then all the ice that we're losing is ending up in the Atlantic Ocean side because of the NW Passage is open [from lack of ice coverage]. That is where the polar ice is ending up and melting. That affects our own lack of ice too. Then the earth rotates and the water starts flowing south in September and then the animals begin to migrate south."

Photo: Cerene J Seppilu

With regards to changes in sea ice, it is important to note that the participants also stressed that the walrus population is healthy, (perhaps becoming too abundant in some areas), and that the walrus does adapt.

As noted in the list above, participants also shared concern about the increase in shipping activity and the impacts that vessels have on the marine environment. Key concerns associated with shipping are:

- Affecting the migration of marine mammals
- Impact of noise pollution on marine mammals
- Ship strikes to walrus and whales
- Harassment of marine mammals
- Disturbance of marine mammals' areas of rest

On Legal Reviews, Understanding the History, and Accountability

Upon reflection of this project, decision making pathways, and consultation, participants offered many benefits to conduct legal reviews and being

familiar with the laws. Within this discussion it was offered that many laws exist that do support Indigenous Peoples rights and hunting rights. However, the system for using and upholding these laws is often flawed and lacks equitable processes for true partnership with Indigenous Peoples – specifically with consideration of supporting Inuit food sovereignty.

One participant offered the importance of the following in order to get to "…the idea of proper management of resources" –

- What in the law is going to support Indigenous Peoples' argument (way of life)?
- The need to understand where the laws came from – "what are the laws [that] perpetuated the laws and policies that are used today?"
- The importance of getting to the beginning of when the processes were established.
- Know the history of the co-management bodies, such as the history of the Eskimo Walrus Commission – how did EWC begin; what were the policies defined and implemented to form the EWC; who was involved in the decision making?

Participants further expressed that reviews and understanding of the history are needed because many resource managers and regulators are unaware of the actual laws or the interpretations of the law. By pointing out to the managers and regulators what the laws are can aid in achieving a better result and pointing them in the right direction.

Within this discussion, participants also identified the importance of holding the state and federal government accountable to their own laws. Examples were given of the federal government not following the Environmental Protection Act when opening up the ocean and coastal seas to oil and gas operations.

It is also important for St. Lawrence Island Yupik (and all Inuit) to understand these policies, regulations, and history – to stand up for their rights. One participant offered the examples of using the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act to "…protect our rights" (Focus

Group Participant. 2019). Knowing this information can help form process today and what steps need to be taken to advance Inuit food sovereignty.

Photo: Carolina Behe

Politics and Lobbying Across scales

Upon further reflection on decision-making pathways, participants highlighted the negative impacts of politics on the environment (inclusive of St. Lawrence Island (SLI) Yupik culture and all of the animals).

Both nationally and internationally there are entities, and some governments, opposed to hunting marine mammals; groups using a single species approach in making arguments to address habitat changes; groups opposed to the use of parts of animals, such as walrus tusk. Often these groups and/or governments lack an understanding of SLI Yupik (and all Inuit) way of life. There is often a misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of the sustainable hunting practices that have been used from time and immemorial and that people here, are part of the ecosystem.

The participants stressed that politics is one of the greatest threats impacting their food security and sovereignty. The lobbying power of well-funded governments and non-government organizations continues to grow as they are afforded the time and means to attend numerous meetings, initiate law suites and legal petitions, campaign to the general public, and influence where information comes from (i.e. research, published papers) which are all used to inform and influence decision-making.

One example provided was a lawsuit filed by an environmental non-profit organization to list walrus under the Endangered Species Act. The Eskimo Walrus Commission learned of the subsequent proceedings immediately before a judge was to hear the case. The Eskimo Walrus Commission and hunters rushed to go through and digest an immense amount of information. There was inadequate time afforded to them in order to prepare and provide expert information as well as culturally relevant arguments needed for a court to make an informed decision that would adversely impact the people most intimately concerned.

On Inuit Laws/Practices

In regard to taking care of the Arctic and management, participants stressed that they have had their own laws/practices from time immemorial. For thousands of years, Indigenous Knowledge alone was responsible for successful use and management of all Arctic resources.

Participants stressed that they have demonstrated the ability to protect and live with respect for all of life around them and hold an "…interconnected system view" (Focus Group Participant. 2019). Taking care of the environment - taking care of each other, of the water, land, animals, and plants, is with an understanding that there is a relationship between everything, that everything is interconnected.

Participants further stressed that their hunting practices are sustainable and done with respect for the walrus. As one participant said, "…we are not hurting the environment…we are not hurting anything by harvesting some [of the animals] …" (Focus Group Participant. 2019).

In thinking about potential negative impacts of regulations, it is important to understand that there is a lasting impact of the colonization that has occurred throughout history and in recent history.

Participants talked of the impact of being forced to abide by another culture's rules and laws. It is felt that these laws and ways of management lacked an understanding of the walrus, of the SLI Yupik culture, of the whole Arctic environment. As one participant shared, "We can manage marine resources better than anyone, we've had thousands and thousands of years of managing. Except when these people started coming and said you just can't do that anymore. You're gonna have somebody else looking at your hunts and manage your hunts for you."

Participants shared that in 1934 Savoonga leaders wrote down their laws/practices through an agreed upon ordinance. The ordinance includes voluntary trip limits and local monitoring activities.

A participant shared that SLI Yupik have demonstrated an ability to be part of the environment and to protect it. Stressing the need to cooperate and share with the rest of the world their knowledge and ways of life.

Key Values

Throughout the discussion concerning Inuit care of the Arctic and tools that are used, a few key values were highlighted.

Nearly every participant stressed the need for **cooperation and sharing**. One participant stated that cooperation and sharing "has enabled us to survive this long". There is a strong sense that the world needs to take a step back from politics and learn how to cooperate and share. This would allow for greater trust and respect, for people to truly communicate, and to have adaptive and holistic management.

Honesty was also stressed as an important tool for survival. Participants shared that knowledge is transmitted to younger generations. If the truth is not spoken, younger generations are put at risk.

Respect for all of life around you, for the land, water, and air, for the animals and plants, and for each other encompasses an understanding that everything is connected. There is a strong relationship between everything within this environment. Participants often raised the importance of respect and that people are part of the environment.

On Languages

In considering decision-making pathways and decision-making, it is important to recognize the role that language plays. People in St. Lawrence Island speak SLI Yupik. The SLI Yupik language holds complex concepts and knowledge. Participants shared that people in Savoonga have had a lot to say and to share. But if the only language being used is English, then there is not a path way for them to contribute, to be heard.

One participant described people as being powerless if the discussion is only in English. Politics play out and policies are formed from these dominant, English-speaking only discussions. This limits equitable engagement, the crucial element of Indigenous Knowledge and direct participation in management and co-management.

On Enforcement

On further reflection about potential negative effects of regulations, participants shared the lasting impacts of being harassed, in the past, by US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) law enforcement assigned to ensure that hunters followed the imposed rules.

Some participants expressed the frustration and degrading feeling of law enforcement intimidation approaches and going through a hunter's things to check on what had been taken. It was felt that this behavior showed a disregard for the hunters' own rules/laws in terms of protecting the animals.

However, within the last couple of years the relationship with USFWS law enforcement has improved. Participants shared that they have not seen a law enforcer for a while. One participant felt that the law enforcement

had backed off since the federal government officially signed the title of SLI over to the people of Savoonga and Gambell (the two communities on SLI).

"I've never been a criminal…ever before in my…but that's the way I feel when these people come. I didn't do anything wrong. And yet, they're there with their guns and they're going through my stuff." - Focus Group Participants

Photo: Cerene J Seppilu

On Indigenous Knowledge

In discussing Indigenous Knowledge within decision making and research, participants shared that it depends on who the people are that they are working with. However, in general it was agreed that there is an increasing respect for what Indigenous Knowledge holders have to offer. People have seen a distinct change in the respect that people hold for Indigenous Knowledge in contrast to a couple of years ago.

Participants provided the example of the USFWS, in feeling that the people they work with today are beginning to view the hunters

(Indigenous Knowledge holders) with authority, understanding that they are speaking a "…powerful truth" (Focus Group Participant. 2019).

Although, there are some researchers and decision makers that are showing respect for Indigenous Knowledge, it was also shared that there continues to be individuals, agencies, and governments, that disregard this important knowledge source and demonstrates a lack of trust and respect. Participants stressed that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done and the importance of educating those that do not understand the SLI Yupik culture and knowledge.

Because Indigenous Knowledge is often not written down, it was felt that it is not taken as seriously as other forms of knowledge and at times treated as anecdotal. Some participants expressed the need to have Indigenous Knowledge captured in writing. There is also a need for adequate and funded processes for the equitable involvement of Indigenous Knowledge holders in federal and state decision-making.

Participants shared the importance of the living memory that their Indigenous Knowledge is carried in. Indigenous Knowledge holders have powerful and reliable memories. This knowledge is passed on and built upon in many different forms (see selection below) and reaches back thousands of years.

Photo: Cerene J Seppilu

Sources of Indigenous Knowledge

In considering the need for a co-management agreement and processes to support a co-production of knowledge approach and equitable space

for Indigenous Knowledge to inform and make decisions, it is important to understand the different forms in which Indigenous Knowledge is held.

Participants shared the importance or recognizing that much of their Indigenous Knowledge is not written down. This knowledge is held and shared in many different forms, such as in carvings, dance, songs, stories, art.

Participants shared the importance of hearing stories, that often the stories "encouraged you to go hunting. Some of those stories reaching back since the beginning and thousands of years old. All the stories have morals of how to live our lives and what the consequences of doing bad and hunting and respecting the animals" (Focus Group Participant. 2019).

Another participant shared the importance of songs. Songs and stories memorialize significant events, such as harvesting a whale, walrus, or a bear. It was further shared that songs are often focused on relationships - relationships between families and groups, between people and the animals. They hold history and knowledge of family and clans. These songs teach children where they came from, geography, their origin. The songs teach how "significant the marine mammals are for your well-being and health" (Focus Group Participant. 2019).

On Pollution

Pollution has been a high point of concern for some time. Participants underlined concern over pollutants released into the water and the air from across the globe that is now polluting the water of the Bering Sea. Shipping is a large part of the discussion about pollution and includes noise, light, and chemical pollution.

Participants shared the importance of the health of the environment. Stressing that the pollution of this environment has direr, adverse impacts the health and cultural integrity of the people living on SLI. Here, people are part of the environment, people rely on the ocean as 'their grocery store'.

Recommendations

Throughout the discussion with the Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee many recommendations naturally surfaced. Below is a bulleted listing of these recommendations:

- Cooperation and Sharing - this includes SLI Yupik sharing their knowledge and the world learning how to cooperate and share, for everyone to work together (for the world to adapt to this approach)
- Know the laws, the history of the policies, the co-management bodies, and of the communities
- Educate about SLI Yupik (and all of Inuit) way of life - through inviting people (governments and non-government organizations) to communities, making and sharing videos and presentations
- Need for long term monitoring
- Need for research questions driven by communities (for example there is a need for research on the impact of harmful algal blooms on marine life)
- Need to be recognized as the experts
- Adopt accountability processes for federal and state agencies (this may include reviews and evaluations)

Conclusion

The Savoonga Marine Mammal Advisory Committee focus group on food sovereignty and self-governance facilitated greater understanding of the Inuit role in current co-management systems and the tools needed to achieve greater equity of voice.

Photo: Cerene J Seppilu