

The Creation of the Foxe Basin Kivalliq North Sapujiyiit/Guardians of the Sea Society

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What can small-scale fisheries in Canada learn from this organization's experience?

We need to take note of how Indigenous communities have protected and conserved local environments and marine populations alongside the existence of small-scale fisheries for generations.

What barriers exist to equity or justice for small-scale fisheries in Canada?

Currently Inuit Traditional Knowledge regarding conservation practices, marine mammal behaviors, etc. are not being trusted as evidence in decision-making processes which is a huge barrier to equity and justice in these small-scale fisheries in the Canadian Arctic.

How can others learn from our experience to address these barriers in policy or governance?

We need to work with Inuit elders, harvesters, and youth to ensure that their knowledge and data is being communicated in such a way that they can effectively advocate for policy change and more involvement in governance decisions.



Arctic Char Drying. Photo credit: Barnie Aggark.

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A common theme I encountered in my first few visits to Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut was that their concerns about how marine mammals are being impacted by shipping and climate change were falling on deaf ears. One elder expressed his frustration at having attended so many meetings like the one I was hosting and sharing his knowledge and concerns and nothing being done. He asked me why I thought my research and my efforts would be any different. The frustration of others in the room was palpable and heartbreaking. This goes a long way to explaining why in 2021, when the Department of Fisheries and Oceans finally presented their plan for the Southampton Island Area of Interest to be turned into a Marine Protected Area (MPA), the proposal was the opposite of what community members had been advocating for years to achieve. Community members wanted to limit the negative impact shipping to the nearby mine was having on marine mammals while also preserving the right to develop a small-scale fishery in the area. The proposal would preserve existing shipping activities and prevent

commercial fisheries within the MPA boundaries. Community members from the three communities that are within or adjacent to the proposed MPA banded together to form the Foxe Basin Kivalliq North Sapujiyit/Guardians of the Sea Society and invited me to serve as their lead researcher. These community members recognized the need to conduct their own independent research and collaborate with a researcher who valued Inuit Traditional Knowledge and would ensure it was reflected in reports that could be used to negotiate an MPA agreement that reflected their needs. While this seems like an inexperienced organization having only become incorporated in November 2021, it builds on the knowledge, experience, advocacy work, and relationships of the founding members in a key point in time to change the future of small-scale fisheries in this region.

The beginning of mining and expressing concerns

In the northern Kivalliq region in Nunavut, on the western side of Hudson Bay there have been a lot of changes in the last 15 years that are impacting communities. This issue started in 2007 when Agnico Eagle Mines began consultations about their proposed Meadowbank gold mine to be located outside of Baker Lake. Through the Nunavut Impact Review Board hearings, community members recognized the potential benefits to Baker Lake, but also the potential risks for other communities. In particular, elders raised their concerns about the potential impacts that increased shipping to the mine would have on their local marine mammals. Elders predicted that the shipping sounds would cause marine mammals to relocate to other areas, making it harder to harvest. As part of the consultations in 2007, community members in Chesterfield Inlet tried to limit the impact that this increase in shipping would have on their marine mammals by asking for local Inuit monitors on each boat to assist with navigation to protect important harvesting and calving areas. This is a measure that Inuit have been pushing for since the 1970's and has not been put into practice. When the IIBA was negotiated only a limited number of communities were considered to be 'direct impact communities,' limiting the support the mines were required to provide to them. As this was

the first mine in the region following the creation of Nunavut, the negotiation process for the IIBA for Meadowbank was a learning process for the Inuit in the region.

Following approval of the mine, in 2008 Agnico Eagle Mines began building the all-weather access road used to travel between Baker Lake and Meadowbank Mine. As the construction of the mine took off, so did the increase in shipping along the inlet between Chesterfield Inlet and Baker Lake to deliver the building supplies and fuel to the mine. Meadowbank Mine officially opened in 2010, marking a continued increase in the numbers of ships sitting in the harbour and traveling along the inlet to supply the mine. Fueling the mine in particular involves sending large vessels across Hudson Bay to be docked in Chesterfield Inlet's harbour for up to 2 weeks at a time while the fuel is offloaded onto a smaller barge to make multiple trips along the inlet to Baker Lake. Since the beginning of the increase in shipping, marine mammals slowly changed where they were located. Previously, during spring, summer, and fall you could see many seals along the harbour and easily harvest seven in an hour.

In 2015, community members began to notice that during the summer when the ships were docked in the harbour the seals were nowhere to be found. There was a three-year period where no belugas were spotted in the harbour, before that every year a few hundred whales would come right into town along the inlet. Their migration routes have changed significantly as a result of this increase in shipping. In Coral Harbour, when the ships travel between Southampton Island and Coats Island this has resulted in less whales, walrus, and seals in the area. In Naujaat the exploration for future mining sites over the past four years by helicopter has impacted the caribou migration routes as well as the marine mammals. Despite noticing the impacts that these activities are having on the wildlife that they rely on for survival, these communities are not considered 'directly impacted' so they do not receive any additional benefits. Community members in this region have noticed a change in the migration route of marine mammals as a result of the shipping to Meadowbank Mine and the Mary River project near Pond Inlet. This includes not just the location but also the timing of their migration. Hunters

have also noticed a decrease in the quality of the skin and health of the marine mammals. Since 2015, the impacts that elders predicted in the 2007 hearings are coming to pass (Newell, Doubleday, & community of Chesterfield Inlet 2020). However, community members are frustrated because their concerns are not being taken seriously by mining companies, shipping companies, and the Kivalliq Inuit Association.

Impacts on wildlife

When elders expressed their concerns and predicted the impact that shipping would have on marine mammals, this was informed by their Inuit Traditional Knowledge (ITK). ITK is a term that encompasses the written and unwritten rules and knowledge about local wildlife, their health and behavior, how to harvest them to support your family and conserve this resource for the future, how to survive when traveling or getting stuck on the land, and more. For elders who lived on the land prior to community settlement, this deep knowledge of the land and wildlife is like an intimate relationship with a family member as their livelihood depends on this. As a result of their knowledge and experience the elders were able to predict the impact that shipping would have on marine mammals which was obvious to them. For example, when it comes to seals, one elder describes how harvesting them in the winter involves standing over the breathing hole in the ice and not moving a muscle or the sound of this movement would alert the seal to their presence and cause it to surface elsewhere. Knowing that shipping in the area would be far louder than any a hunter could make, it was obvious to this elder that the noise would cause the seals and other marine mammals to move away from the harbour as a result.

Not only are the marine mammals being impacted by the shipping and mining activity in the region—caribou were affected first by the all-weather access road as the slopes originally had crushed gravel that was too sharp so the caribou wouldn't cross the roads. Baker Lake's Hunters and Trappers Organization brought this concern up and they changed the material used on the slopes where crossings typically happen so the migration is not impacted

as much.

In the summer caribou migrate along the shores of the inlet from Baker Lake to Chesterfield Inlet on the north side. When they reach Ranger Seal Bay they swim across the inlet and continue migrating along the inlet to the harbour before heading south. Hunters from Baker Lake and Chesterfield Inlet were gathered on the north side of the inlet between Chesterfield Inlet and Baker Lake waiting for the herd to approach. Each hunter was hoping to harvest enough caribou to feed their family until their next trip in a few weeks. In a family of 6, one caribou would last about 4 days. They were ready and waiting for the caribou to get close enough when all of a sudden, the herd turned around and went back inland. The hunters were confused about what had caused this change in their predictable migration route. Five minutes later the hunters heard the sound of an approaching ship that the caribou had heard which scared them away. This was very frustrating because these hunters had prepared for this harvest for a few days, only having the weekend to hunt as they work during the week. They went home empty handed and would have to go out again next weekend and hope they will be more successful. The gas money and supplies to go out and be unsuccessful cost approximately CAD 400 plus the wear and tear it would have on their vehicles and equipment. Not only did this change in direction result in a failed harvesting attempt, but it also changed the migration route for the rest of the year, causing the caribou to be harder to find for the rest of the winter due to this rerouting of their migration route. Not only do ships impact the caribou migration, but also the sound of helicopters in the region for exploration.

Continuing to express concerns

While these impacts of shipping are being felt by community members and despite feeling like their concerns are falling on deaf ears, they did not give up. In 2015, the Planning Commission began technical meetings to create the next version of the draft Nunavut Land Use Plan. The Nunavut Land Use Plan is a legal requirement under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement

to ensure that Inuit values and priorities will guide and direct the short- and long-term development in the area. During this process the impacts of shipping on the communities in the northern Kivalliq region were again raised. Also this year, Bernie Aggark brought five Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) representatives to Quebec to meet with Fisheries and Oceans to discuss the need to monitor water quality. It was from this meeting that a collaboration began with researchers at the University of Manitoba, St. John's, and Saskatchewan, with the support of the Government of Nunavut. This led to the creation of the GENICE project out of the University of Manitoba to study the preparedness for oil spills (GENICE 2 has now been funded for the next 3 years).

The following is a detailed timeline leading up to the creation of the Foxe Basin Kivalliq North Sapujiyit/Guardians of the Sea Society:

2016

Barnie met with Coast Guards, Ministry of Transport Canada, and a representative of Coral Harbour about the impacts of shipping in the north. Representatives of cruise ships were also present to discuss access to the north through the Northwest Passage and accommodating passengers in the northern communities. In this meeting Barnie reiterated the community concerns and observations about how the increase in shipping since 2008 has already impacted marine mammals in the region.

Consultations began for the Meliadine Mine near Rankin Inlet. Barnie again raised his concerns about the impacts shipping to Meadowbank was already having on the region and the impact that increased shipping because of the Meliadine Mine will have. The argument Barnie has been making over the years is not that he is opposed to mines, rather, that it needs to be done in such a way that it doesn't come at the expense of the survival of community harvesters in communities such as Chesterfield Inlet.

Following the technical hearing, WWF and Bernie Aggark organized a workshop with HTO, Hamlet Council, and interested community members for a mapping project to respond to the draft land use plan. Out of this workshop came an article in Nunatsiaq News titled “Solutions exist for Chesterfield Inlet’s marine life concerns,” which highlighted the need for Inuit monitors on nearby ships, noise reduction materials, reduced speed, and a deep sea port to eliminate fuel transfers between Chesterfield Inlet and Baker Lake as well as the amount of time ships spend docked in the harbour.

Community members in Chesterfield Inlet began a community-based research collaboration for Sarah Newell’s doctoral thesis. Between 2016 and 2018 they collaborated on this project to demonstrate how food security, cultural continuity, and community health and wellbeing are being impacted by climate changes and increased shipping in the region.

2017

Representatives of Chesterfield Inlet and Coral Harbour met with representatives for Agnico Eagle Mines and Desganeau. In these meetings, community members advocated for rerouting shipping routes around Coats Island rather than between Coats Island and Southampton Island, as well as changing the amount of time ships are docked in Chesterfield Inlet harbour.

2018

Sarah Newell and David Kattagatsiak presented the results of the community-based research to Oceans Canada and McMaster University.

DFO brought up the concept of a Southampton Island Marine Protected Area. This proposal was rejected by impacted community members because it did not represent their concerns and their desire to protect against shipping impacts. Community members are looking to negotiate an agreement that will respect their concerns and protect the waters, mammals, and community members in the future.

2020

At the Northern Lights Trade Show there was a special session on the impacts of shipping in Chesterfield Inlet. During this session, representatives from Chesterfield Inlet, WWF, the University of Manitoba, and Sarah Newell presented the work they had done gathering the concerns and evidence about the impact shipping is having on marine mammals and the potential risk of oil spills in the region. They also had an opportunity to engage audience members in a discussion about their work; audience members included mining and shipping company executives, government officials, and other interested community members from across the Arctic.

2021

MakeWay hosted a workshop between Baker Lake, Chesterfield Inlet, Coral Harbour, and Naujaat to discuss the proposed Marine Protected Area in the region. This meeting included representatives of each community's HTO, Hamlet, and KIA. Out of this meeting a working group was created to proactively engage in the MPA process, pursue community specific research interests, and create a guardians program. The working group also agreed on the need for an in-house researcher and Sarah Newell was suggested.

In the fall of 2021, community representatives from Chesterfield Inlet, Coral Harbour, and Naujaat decided instead to create an independent society under the Government of Nunavut. This Society was called Foxe Basin Kivalliq North Sapujiyit/Guardians of the Sea - named for the Foxe Basin region of Hudson Bay in which these three most northern communities in Kivalliq are located. Sapujiyit is the Inuktitut word for Guardians of the Sea and encompasses the spirit of the organization. We have gone on to envision our organization conducting numerous research projects at the direction of these three communities. Our organization supports Inuit research governance by designing research projects that build local Inuit youth research capacity, manages the data that is collected and that is owned and controlled by each community's Hunters and Trappers Organizations,

and prioritizes community concerns and methods of communicating results in our work. In this way we are working to remove barriers to equity and justice in the way that small-scale fisheries in Arctic Canada are governed and how policy is created. By building and supporting Inuit research capacity, we are ensuring that Inuit Traditional Knowledge is valued and used to inform small-scale fisheries policies moving forward. This work is only possible through the collaboration with regional partners such as each community's Hunters and Trapper Organizations, the Kivalliq Inuit Association, Kivalliq Wildlife Board, Ukkusiksalik National Park Committee, and the Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated Department of Wildlife and Environment. We are also supported in our efforts by a growing list of funders and research collaborators, such as WWF-Canada, MakeWay, the University of Manitoba, ArcticNet, and the Arctic Eider Society. Hopefully our growing momentum as a new organization will inspire others battling barriers to equitable policies and governance in small-scale fisheries across Canada to assert the value of their local knowledge and need to have a voice when decisions are made.

Reference

Newell, S., Doubleday N.C., & Community of Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut. 2020. Sharing country food: connecting health, food security, and cultural continuity in Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut. *Polar Research* 39: 3755.