

**PERSPECTIVES ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INTEREST  
AND NEEDS IN THE PROTECTION AND UTILISATION  
OF ARCTIC MARINE RESOURCES<sup>1</sup>**

**A Background Paper for the Arctic Marine Strategic Plan Workshop**

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<sup>1</sup> The content of this paper is the responsibility of the author(s) and does not necessarily represent the views of the PAME Working Group as a whole, or its member countries.

## **Section 1 – Who are the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic?**

Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic are represented in the Arctic Council by the six Indigenous Peoples Organisations (IPO), holding status as Permanent Participants:

### **Aleut International Association - AIA**

The Aleut International Association was formed in 1998 and represents Aleuts who live in the Aleutians, Pribilofs and Commanders Islands and Kamchatka Peninsula, approximately 2.200 in the US and more than 400 on the Russian side.

### **Arctic Athabaskan Council - AAC**

The Arctic Athabaskan Council was formed in 2000 to create an international organisation for northern peoples of Athabaskan descent in Northwest Territories, Yukon and Alaska. It represents approximately 40.000 people in Canada and the United States.

### **Gwich'in Council International - GCI**

Gwich'in Council International represents approximately 9.000 Gwich' in people of northern Alaska, Yukon and Northwest Territories in Canada.

### **Inuit Circumpolar Conference - ICC**

ICC was established in 1977, and it represents 150.000 Inuit of Russia (Chukotka), the United States of America (Alaska), Canada and Greenland.

### **Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North - RAIPON**

RAIPON was established in 1990, and represents the cultural, economic, environmental, political, and social interests of nearly 40 Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North with a total population of over 200.000.

### **Saami Council**

The Saami Council was established in 1956 and represents the 100.000 indigenous Saami people inhabiting what are today Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Kola Peninsula in the Russian Federation.



© AMAP. Map showing the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic.

The Indigenous Peoples of the seven Arctic states live in various conditions that differ not only between the Permanent Participants, but also within their own areas. Even though they all live in the Arctic they do have different ways of life. They live in states with diverse cultures, political systems and history, all of which influence their lives.

The Inuit in Greenland and the Saami in the Nordic countries live in societies which are very much influenced by the North European / Nordic way of life. The Inuit in Canada and Alaska, and the Athabaskan and the Aleut people are influenced by North American / Canadian society. The Saami, Aleut and Inuit in Russia on the other hand live in societies much more connected to the Russian way of life, together with the other Indigenous Peoples represented by RAIPON. Even though these peoples are influenced by the states they are living in, these peoples still are very connected to their traditional cultures. Through their traditional skills in hunting, herding and fishing, for millennia they have been able to make use of the resources given by the environment.

One has to remember these differences when talking about the Permanent Participants. The Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic are not one homogenous group. Like the Arctic Council member states, Indigenous Peoples have different interests and concerns when it comes to marine issues.

Not all the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic are directly dependent on the marine environment. Even though many of the different Arctic Indigenous Peoples have been interconnected, e.g. through trade, which means that all Arctic Indigenous Peoples have an indirect interest in environmental issues concerning the marine environment. Some are inland people, living of harvesting the land and living as reindeer herders or caribou hunters. Having in mind that the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic occupy a large part of the Northern Hemisphere, it is impossible to get an overall Indigenous point of view on “Indigenous Peoples Interests and Needs in the Protection and Utilisation of Arctic Marine Resources”. That said, all Indigenous Peoples are interested in protecting the environment of the Arctic from pollution and degradation on land and marine environments.

From time immemorial the Aleut and the Inuit have been connected with the sea. They make a living from the sea. Fish and sea mammals are the main source of their diet even today, where the world is getting smaller and the interaction between peoples and cultures has led to the import of new habits and food. This means it is of utmost importance for these peoples and their cultures that the marine environment is kept clean for the future inhabitants of the Arctic. It is important that marine living resources remain available for these peoples.

The right to have your culture protected is not always easy for the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic. An example is the Coastal Saami in Norway who have had problems in being recognised as this might have been because the Saami identity has been strongly identified with reindeer herding. This has caused problems, because there have been no special rights for the Coastal Saami. Fishermen from southern Norway have with modern equipment been over-fishing, which has caused problems for the small-scale fishermen in the fjords of Finnmarken.

### ***Conclusion***

Indigenous Peoples must have access to the marine resources without being forced to apply to outsiders for permission. They must be decision-makers on how to manage the resources in their own areas. This does not only imply to the living resources but also to the sub-surface resources, such as oil and gas. The Indigenous Peoples must have a chance to oppose or approve the exploitation of resources in their area. The Indigenous Peoples must have a share of the economic outcome from exploitation in their area.

There have to be clear division on responsibility, when exploitation is damaging the environment both from the Indigenous Peoples side but for sure also from the outsiders coming into the area. As an example one can think of the Exxon Valdez catastrophe where 42 millions of crude oil spoiled and polluted the area in southern Alaska.

How should the preparedness be divided between the parties to secure an effective and constructive work in case of a catastrophe? Another question is how can economic compensation for loss of hunting and fishing ever cover the loss for not only the generation who is immediately affected by the pollution, but for the future generations of Indigenous hunters and fishermen? This is a very important question that needs to be discussed among all stakeholders of the Arctic.

When the discussion comes to the importance of the marine and coastal environment to Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic there is no doubt that the marine environment plays a very important role to the Indigenous Peoples. Even though one can argue that only a small part of the population is directly involved as fishermen and hunters, the cultural and traditional connections to the marine environment are very important

What strategies should the Indigenous Peoples put forward to secure that they are part of the management of the environment? It might be that the different Indigenous Peoples have different opinions on how to manage the marine environment which makes it even more important that these are partaking in the management of the resources, in their respective homelands. There might be conflicting interests: Fishermen and hunters on one side and

Indigenous Peoples who would like to exploit the resources on the land or at sea. To make sure that all peoples are heard and that all interests are taken into account will take time. It will be necessary to consult all the different peoples, before getting a clear overview of the Indigenous Peoples interests in the marine environment.

## **Section 2 – A Perspective from ICC Greenland**

- By Carl Chr. Olsen

### ***Introduction***

Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic have inhabited the whole circumpolar lands and waters and have developed unique cultural and socio-economic features different from those of the warm climate areas of the globe. We are dealing with the indigenous peoples of Siberia, Greenland, Arctic Canada, Alaska and Arctic Scandinavia.

**Inuit**, living in Russia, Greenland, Alaska and Canada number today approximately 150.000 souls of which 55.000 are from Greenland, which has been inhabited for some 4500 years.

### ***Importance of the Marine Environment***

Most of the Arctic cultures base their livelihood from the marine environment, both marine mammals and the fish as well as the migratory birds.

Both inland cultures and the marine-based cultures in the Arctic interact and are therefore interdependent on these cultural and economic bases. By the economy we think not only of the monetary economy and trade but also the subsistence economy which has enormous influence on education for the social and cultural life of the Indigenous Peoples.

The land and waters where the culture has its roots have also an importance in the spiritual life and mental health of the peoples living there. Those spiritual relationships with the land and waters fostered in indigenous peoples a sincere respect for the land and the resources. This relationship – developed by these peoples through chains of generations for several thousands of years – is based on the ability to adapt to the regional and local environments. And the time-depths is now on a critical challenge since the last five decades of influence are in a process of changing the perception and status of both the knowledge and its practical applications.

These changes include the rapid change of the diet and the base of information, especially in relation to the environment and the respect for it. We have to realise that these changes are applicable to the acculturation process and interaction with the rest of the world. Therefore it is important to weigh the balance of these implications.

The indigenous peoples have repeatedly asked for cultural sensitivity in these developmental processes. We will emphasise that we are also responsive and responsible for these processes and invite the parties in this discussion to be so as well.

The way we have confronted the western legislative processes was and still is that we consider that the laws of western origin have been imposed upon us. It is only 30 years ago that that Arctic Indigenous Peoples were recognised as partners in the development of the Arctic political and legislative processes at different phases. Our international political participation is still on the process of development but there is no doubt that local and regional as well as national recognition have promoted positive relations between the dominant and minority societies at different levels.

We are being forced to face some challenges of development as a result of changes in the Arctic climate. These include that we have to prepare for cultural and economic adaptation, which also will influence our social life. Our cultures are characterised by the ability to adapt to new situations without losing cultural and spiritual essence. That requires a political stability among the peoples living through this process. We think that this is the thing we are

asking for now. Our political influence on terms of self-determination has not yet been fully recognised by our counter-parts in the Arctic States.

Even though the nature cannot count on our will the people dealing with nature are in charge of the will, also the political will. Maybe we should stick together and define in which way we could develop best practices for the political interactive development between all stakeholders of this new phase of development. This way we will all share the responsibility for the new trends. The democratic process does not necessarily count on the majority alone, but also recognises of the say of all the relevant stakeholders.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion the changes in the nature are forcing us to adapt to a new situation which we have to keep in mind.

- The natural resources of the Arctic are the base of living for the Arctic peoples.
- The changes of access to these resources force us to adapt to the availability of different resources both of natural and humane character.
- The quests for new solutions will necessarily foster sharing the responsibility for political decision-making.
- The peoples of the Arctic have to rethink their own perception both of environmental reality and the new political quests.

### **Section 3 – A Perspective from Aleut International Association**

- By Victoria Gofman:

For thousands of years, the Aleut people have called home a chain of more than 200 islands stretching westward for almost 2000 kilometres from the western point of the Alaska Peninsula towards the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia. The archipelago of the volcanic islands was named Aleutians by the Russian explorers Bering and Chirikov -- who landed on the islands in 1741. The inhabitants of the islands, who called themselves *Unangan* or *Unangax*, were called Aleuts by the Russian explorers and have become known as Aleuts by the western cultures.

The Aleutian Islands are characterised by harsh climatic conditions with high volcanic activity, treeless landscapes, frequent fogs, and high winds. Despite the severe climate, abundant marine flora and fauna provided a fertile environment where the Aleut people created a sophisticated culture and economy that enabled them to maintain their autonomy for thousands of years. After almost three hundred years of contact with westerners, borders, the International Date Line, political systems and languages have separated the Aleut people. Yet, they have managed to maintain their connection to their culture by living off the sea and its resources.

Today there are 13 communities in the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands region. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census for 2000, the population of these islands was 8,162 people, of which Aleuts number approximately 2,200. In Russia, there are more than 300 Aleuts on the Bering Island and more than a hundred on Kamchatka Peninsula. The economy of the region is tied to the sea as it has been for centuries. Commercial fishing is the primary economic activity and source of income. The region has a history of military strategic interest with formerly used defence sites and former underground nuclear test sites at Amchitka, between the Pacific and Bering Seas. The Aleutian Region is also the location of an important northbound ocean current. This current carries nutrients and contaminants that well up from the deep ocean basin. It is an important intersection where the ecosystem and manmade impacts from local, regional and international sources converge. Leads to concerns on the condition of the Bering Sea Ecosystems.

The Bering Sea is a major international fishing ground. More than half of U.S. fisheries landings are from the Bering Sea catch. Dutch Harbor is the number one fishing port in volume of fishery landings in the U.S. There are several states and federal agencies regulating the resources.

Some of the concerns identified by many communities focus on:

→ **Understanding the source and impact of contaminants**

Potential sources include long distance transport in ocean and air currents and transport in biological receptors. Regional sources in Alaska include over 60 formerly used defence sites, former underground nuclear test sites (Amchitka), waste caused by the Pacific and Bering Sea fishing fleets, and local sources of contamination in villages (leaking storage tanks and landfills sites). There is very little data from the Russian Aleut villages.

→ **Understanding the impacts of climate change**

Invasive species, beach erosion, change of migratory patterns are some of the problems that require immediate attention.

→ **Sustainability of important subsistence and commercial species**

Community – Based Natural Resources Management of subsistence and commercial resources to continue to be developed.

→ **Monitoring of environmental health**

Communities need on-going monitoring of traditional foods and improved water and sanitation infrastructure.

→ **Research needs**

Communities should be more involved in logistical support, monitoring, collection and sharing of traditional knowledge, communication and interaction with scientists and be involved in research and international collaboration.

→ **Transport needs**

The region is dependent on air and water based transport systems. Air travel is often unreliable due to weather conditions and expensive. Development of a regular ferry system, with possible connection to Russia, would be a welcome sign of economic development. At the same time, provisions to develop a commercial adverse effect on marine environment. Cargo is primarily transported by sea.

→ **Monitoring of Environmental changes**

Environmental Changes are imminent. Indigenous peoples, including Aleuts, whose lives are tied to the sea, will not be able to move elsewhere if their environment is no longer inhabitable and to survive as peoples. Preserving their environment is equal to their continuation as peoples. Recognition of this fact by politicians, economists and scientists should lead to co-operative actions where indigenous communities take part as stakeholders and can exercise their decision-making rights.