



## **TERMS OF REFERENCE PIKIALASORSUAQ COMMISSION**

### **OFFICIAL NAME**

Pikialasorsuaq Commission

### **BACKGROUND**

Pikialasorsuaq, the North Water, is the largest Arctic polynya and the most biologically productive region north of the Arctic Circle. Leading polar scientists and other international institutions have focused on the Pikialasorsuaq in recent decades because of its biological, economic and cultural importance. Pikialasorsuaq has been recognized by Inuit for generations as a critical habitat. Inuit use and occupation of Northeast Canada and Greenland is linked to Pikialasorsuaq and the abundance of marine life it supports.

The northern ice bridge that helps define this polynya was also likely the earliest human migration route between Canada and Greenland. This bridge, connecting Umimmaat Nunaat (Ellesmere Island) and Northwest Greenland, is symbolic of the strong ties between Inuit and the desire to cooperate and to arrive at a common vision for shared resources.

Communities in the Qikiqtani and Avanersuaq regions continue to directly rely on the polynya's biological productivity. Pikialasorsuaq is a critical resource for many migratory species upon which these communities, as well as Inuit communities farther afield, depend. In some recent years, the northern ice bridge in Kane Basin, Nares Straight and Smith Sound (Ikeq) has become less reliable and the polynya less defined. The consequences of these changes, linked to larger climatic shifts observable in many parts of the Arctic, are not known.

In September of 2013, the Inuit Circumpolar Council-Greenland hosted a workshop in Nuuk at which representatives from communities around Pikialasorsuaq met to discuss the polynya and to explore shared concerns and aspirations for this region. This meeting confirmed a strong regional interest in a bi-national dialogue about the future of the polynya. This group recommended both at the meeting and in the ensuing report that a commission be constituted to conduct consultations in Nunavut and Greenlandic communities closest to Pikialasorsuaq to

continue this discussion and assess strategies aimed at safeguarding this region, including harvesting interests, for future generations.

## **PURPOSE**

- To conduct community consultations in Nunavut and Greenlandic communities most closely connected to Pikialasorsuaq.
- Based on regional input, to recommend a strategy or strategies for safeguarding and monitoring the health of Pikialasorsuaq for future generations.
- To promote further cooperation between Inuit communities in Greenland and Nunavut who depend upon this polynya and its biological productivity.
- To prepare a report of the Commission's findings and recommendations.

## **COMPOSITION**

The Pikialasorsuaq Commission consists of three Commissioners: Eva Aariak, former Premier of Nunavut, was appointed the Canadian Commissioner; Kuupik Vandersee Kleist, the former Premier of Greenland was appointed the Greenland Commissioner; and, Okalik Egeesiak, the Inuit Circumpolar Council Chair is the International Commissioner.

## **DECISION MAKING**

- The Pikialasorsuaq Commission will work on a consensus basis.
- The ICC Chair will act as Chair of the Pikialasorsuaq Commission.

## **BUDGET**

A budget for the Pikialasorsuaq Commission will be developed based on anticipated costs.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

All public communications, products including the final report will be issued in Inuktut, Kalaallisut, and English. The Pikialasorsuaq Commission will develop communications materials to make certain communities and interested sectors are informed of the Commissions work.