

Report: Inuit consultation, Nuuk Greenland 30/1/12

Introduction:

At the end of January, WWF gathered representatives of key Inuit organizations and governments from Greenland and Nunavut to consult on the Last Ice Area project. The Last Ice Area project, launched last year, is a project to look at the future of the area of summer sea ice anticipated to last the longest in the face of climate change. Scientific modelling suggests the core of this area is likely to range from Canada's High Arctic Islands in the west to North Greenland in the east. A whole ecological system, ranging from plankton to people, and polar bears and whales, is connected to the ice.

This consultation meeting, co-facilitated by WWF and the Inuit Circumpolar Council was a key milestone in the project. WWF has been clear from the beginning that Inuit must play a defining role in deciding on any future management for this area. During this meeting, Inuit representatives helped WWF identify some knowledge gaps around the area and WWF shared ideas on gaps that WWF hopes to fill with the help of Inuit. Inuit representatives also expressed opinions about potential future management options for the Last Ice Area.

Main points from the meeting were:

- There were opinions expressed that Inuit should be starting to talk about this area now, because in 10-15 years, superpower interest in the area may diminish the voices of local people.
- Some people questioned the need for an overarching management regime for the area – they noted that sectoral and species-specific management regimes already exist or are in process of being developed.
- Other people expressed the opinion that it is too early to discuss management of the area, as there are still too many knowledge gaps for informed management proposals.
- Inuit organizations represented want both traditional knowledge and science to inform any policy decisions made on the area. They were appreciative of WWF's position that these are parallel systems of knowledge that should not be integrated, but used as equal sources to inform policy.
- There is a need to be careful not to diminish economic opportunities for local communities through the establishment of protected areas.
- The organizations represented are open to working with WWF on knowledge gaps in the LIA and other related regions (i.e. populated and used areas that are affected by migration routes and cryospheric systems). A desire was expressed for a fund to be established to pay for this.

- A recommendation in a forthcoming report on adaptation by the Greenland government will recommend the collection of local observations. Perhaps there is a role for the project in both encouraging local observation, but also in bringing those observations to the attention of scientists and policy makers.
- Participants in the consultation would like the knowledge gained in the project to be open and accessible.
- Some participants noted that they would like Inuit involvement in on the ground research.

Specific knowledge gaps identified included:

- Ice modelling – they would like to see the ice modelling refined so that it shows ice extent/nature (i.e. first year vs. multi year) in all seasons for the next few decades
- Scenarios of biological productivity of different areas, based on the sort of refined modelling described above
- Commercial fishery projections (species, biomass) under different climate/ice scenarios
- The potential effects of black carbon reduction on ice extent and persistence
- Collection of Inuit knowledge of polar bear behaviour in the absence of ice
- Narwhal migration Lancaster sound to NW Greenland
- Survey of current human uses of LIA
- Collection of all traditional knowledge about the area
- Information on whether ocean currents and temperatures are changing
- What are the effects of icebreaker activity on wildlife?

Next Steps

- WWF is to write up the notes from the meeting and distribute to participants for review.
- WWF will undertake to work with participants to develop projects to tackle the knowledge gaps identified.
- WWF will continue to update participants on project progress, and to consult with them on the potential development of management options for the Last Ice Area.
- WWF Denmark is preparing a desk study of the Greenland Last Ice Area focusing on socio-economic and cultural use of the area,

Annex: participants

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