



# A CALL FROM THE INUIT

## CLEAN-UP ARCTIC SHIPPING



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More than 50% of the Inuit diet comes from the land and the sea, and Inuit people inhabit some 40% of Canada’s landmass, usually living along coastlines very close to the sea. Subsistence culture is an important mainstay for Inuit where the sea ice plays a very important role. The impact of climate change on the Arctic sea ice has meant that shipping is increasing in Arctic Canada, and with it, concerns over safer shipping.

Emissions from ships are having a direct impact on Inuit language, knowledge, experiential learning, tradition; physical, mental and social health, spirituality, and more. So with so much at stake for the health of our Inuit population and our arctic flora and fauna, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Canada has long delivered a strong message for change. We recently told the IMO to ban the use of heavy fuel oil in Arctic shipping, and thankfully, the IMO is developing a heavy fuel oil (HFO) ban to help fulfill its mandate of protecting human and ocean health, as well as mitigating the effects of climate change under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### CURRENT SEA SHIPPING

Shipping in the Arctic is limited to a short summer season when the annual sealift delivers less-perishable foods and goods to the 53 Inuit communities in Inuit Nunangat (Inuit homeland). We should also note that Inuit Nunangat encompasses roughly 35% of Canada’s land mass and 50% of Canada’s coastline. The annual sealift offers a more affordable means to move goods than the very costly air alternative. Other sea shipping happens to and from the natural resource extraction sites in northern communities, bringing up equipment and bringing resources down to southern locations for consumers. Add on the global climate changes that are opening up valuable sea shipping routes across the Arctic, and this increase in marine traffic (further increases projected) comes with significant environmental costs, most notably from HFO.

HFO is an environmentally harmful fuel that has already undergone a ban in the waters surrounding the Antarctic. The ban, implemented in 2011, mandates that all ships transiting the Antarctic must carry higher grade fuels in order to limit

the potential impact from an HFO spill. Inuit communities in Canada are pushing for the same protections for the Arctic. HFO emission pollution and potential spills threaten the integrity of marine ecosystems; and in the cold temperatures, the viscous liquid becomes even more difficult to clean up as it mixes with moving waters and spreads out quickly. Factor in the long winter seasons with various shifting ice formations and the isolated nature of the region, and clean-up efforts for any fuel – let alone HFO – become futile.

Vessels using HFO are not often equipped with the financial (insurance) and logistical resources to reliably clean-up HFO spills, so that burden often falls on the Inuit communities as they try to protect the environment – a task they are unprepared for. Should an environmental accident occur, or a search and rescue operation be needed, the Inuit communities need the resources and support in order to respond appropriately. The protection of the flora and fauna, and food security are vital to Inuit communities but the very limited access and resources such as pollution clean-up equipment and the

need for training Inuit communities must be taken into account. Additionally, HFO air pollutants, including black carbon, pose threats to the air quality and health of human and mammal populations. Note also that black carbon is what is called a ‘short-lived climate forcer’.

HFO contamination affects water quality for all marine flora and fauna, and in the Arctic food web, the effects spread quickly to mammals at higher trophic levels, including humans. Adverse health effects are also felt by the many seabirds who have breeding and feeding grounds along the shipping routes.

With the numerous health and environmental risks associated with the carriage and combustion of HFO, the banning of HFOs is widely supported by Canada’s Inuit, and international allies in Greenland, multiple Scandinavian countries and Russia. During ICC Canada’s opening plenary at the IMO’s Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR) meeting, in February 2019 ICC Canada emphasized that Inuit communities must not be negatively affected by the decisions made by the PPR sub-committee working towards an HFO ban. Provisions to protect Inuit social, cultural and economic interests are required and can be achieved by engaging Inuit communities throughout this work of implementing the ban.

**MOVING FORWARD**

Building upon Article 18 of the ICC Utqiagvik Declaration produced at the Inuit Circumpolar Council’s General Assembly of July 2018, ICC Canada is directed to:

*“...advocate for the enforcement of the IMO Polar Code, other international and national regulations, advancing emergency response, and phasing out heavy fuel oil in order to minimize impacts on marine mammals and fish and to prevent disruption of seasonal hunting, and for safety and environmental protection.”*

ICC Canada also emphasized that the implementation of the ban must not put undue burden or financial responsibility upon the Inuit communities. As one of Canada’s most socio-economically vulnerable populations, Inuit households cannot afford a cost increase in delivered food and goods. Nor can they afford to lose food security from subsistence living practices. It is at these crossroads that the PPR Sub-committee must strike the right balance between cleaner shipping fuel usage and financial costs.

Borrowing from the successes in the shipping changes south of sixty degrees, Canada and other circumpolar countries are supporting the use of cleaner burning



fuels within Arctic waters, designating Emission Control Areas (ECAs) in locations with high populations and environmentally sensitive areas. Switching from HFOs to cleaner fuels while in ECAs, would be a relatively easy and cost efficient way to mitigate the negative air emission effects of HFOs. The switch would also see low-sulphur distillate fuel usage reduce current HFO black carbon emissions by up to 80%. Other factors to consider in alleviating the pressure on Inuit communities are spill-response resources and training for all shipping vessels, infrastructure, sufficient insurance coverage for spills, and response plans that limit the environmental damage in case of a spill.

Climate change has caused the most devastation for the people who are already the most vulnerable. In areas where policy and regulations can readily limit the effects of pollution, it is our responsibility as global citizens to ensure that we respond accordingly, with protective measures to ensure healthy populations and aid to an environment that is already under extreme negative pressures. Inuit communities have thousands of years of inter-generational ecological knowledge that monitors the holistic changes felt within the Arctic environment. Nations have the technology to cause less environmental impact. If we combine them, we can offer the people, the plants and the species of the Arctic a safer place to live.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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 Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk was born in Puvirnituk on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay in Northern Quebec (Nunavik) in Canada. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Concordia University, Montreal; and a Master’s degree in Anthropology from Laval University, Quebec City. Her areas of interest include Inuit political and community development, education, justice (particularly Inuit customary law), the northern environment, and the Inuit culture and language.

**ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION**

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 The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an Indigenous Peoples’ Organization (IPO) which has Consultative Status to the United Nations and is a Permanent Participant to the Arctic Council. Founded in 1977 to promote and celebrate the unity of

160,000 Inuit from Alaska (USA), Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life. Regarding climate change, we believe that it is crucial for world leaders and governments to recognize, respect and fully implement the human rights of Inuit and all other indigenous peoples across the globe.

**ENQUIRIES**

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