

SUBMISSION for COSEWIC (*Nattiit*/Ringed Seals)

SHEILA & SAMANTHA KATSAK

WITH

INUKSIUTIT: INUIT FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN NUNAVUT RESEARCH COLLECTIVE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ringed seals are a keystone Arctic species for Inuit for food, dog food, clothing, culture, and well-being. This submission, based on an independent Canada Inuit Nunangat United Kingdom (CINUK)-funded community-led research in Mittimatalik and Kinngait, focuses on two elements. First, it analyses the process of the COSEWIC consultation and reflects on 2019 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on Ringed Seal. Second, it analyses the impact that designating the ringed seal as a Species of Concern on the Species at Risk list would have on Inuit communities. We observe that the 2019 COSEWIC report is limited in following advised research practices in Nunavut as set out by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami *National Inuit Strategy on Research* (2018). We further observe that the consultation process excludes Inuktut (Inuit language) speakers. The absence of a translated 2019 COSEWIC report and a consultation questionnaire in Inuktitut means that a large percentage of Inuit Knowledge Holders 65 years and older are unable to engage meaningfully with the consultation. Finally, and crucially, the 2019 COSEWIC report and the consultation process has had a limited and biased engagement with Inuit Knowledge Holders and does not include a thorough analysis of the impact that (potential) quotas have on Inuit and Inuit culture. Based on interviews conducted in October 2023 as part of our community-led research project Inuksiutit: Food Sovereignty in Nunavut (IFSNU), this submission provides individual, local Inuit perspectives of the importance of Ringed Seal and the detrimental impact of quotas on a personal and societal level for Inuit.

In this submission to COSEWIC (Ringed Seal) Consultation, we make the following recommendations.

1. Revise the 2019 COSEWIC report and include to a much greater extent Inuit Knowledge Holders and Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit. Inuit need to be actively part of all facets of research conducted in Inuit Nunangat.
2. Ensure that the revised 2019 COSEWIC report is published in three languages English/French/Inuktitut. The inclusion of an Inuktut/Inuktitut version is pivotal for a wider meaningful engagement with the report and the consultation.
3. Ensure that a revised consultation questionnaire includes an Inuktut/Inuktitut version alongside the English and French version. Furthermore, ensure that the Inuktitut Information Sheet has the proper link to the revised questionnaire. Paper copies need to be distributed widely in the community for those digitally illiterate.
4. Following this, we urge that DFO considers implementing these recommendations and halts the current consultation to demarcate the Ringed Seal as a Species of Concern until it has provided a trilingual revised COSEWIC report and consultation questionnaire that includes Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit to a much greater extent and in partnership with Inuit.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

1. Introduction: Seal in Inuit lives

Ringed Seal continues to be an important food source for Inuit families (c.f. Kingsley 1990). Seal hunting is a deeply rooted cultural practice that has been central to Inuit subsistence and lifeways for centuries. Complex Inuit environmental knowledge systems (Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit) passed down through the generations relating to land, ice, climate, and animal biology, health and behaviour have enabled Inuit to survive and thrive in demanding and changing environments (Boas 1888, Condon et al. 1995, Pelly 2001, Katsak 2023, Wilson et al 2021, Wachowich in collaboration with Awa, Katsak and Katsak 1999). Technologies and skills required for the harvesting, butchering, and processing of seals, and Inuit environmental management strategies, have adapted in line with changing conditions, including those most recently those brought on by the effects of climate change (Sansoulet J, et al. 2020, Simonee et al 2021, Matthiassen 1928, Watt-Cloutier 2015, Wenzel 2004). Ringed Seal is not only critical to Inuit culture as a dependable economic resource and nutritious food supply when food costs can be high (Borré 1990, Wenzel 1991). It also forms the basis of a holistic knowledge system that incorporates Inuit concepts of physical, mental and spiritual health, wellness, and a broader sense of community (Brody, 1975, Borré 1990, 1994, Rasmussen 1929, Peter et al 2002). For centuries, Inuit women have clothed their children in sealskins and continue to this day to ensure the intergenerational transmission of processing, preparation and sewing skills essential to this functional and creative practice (Katsak and Wachowich, 2020, 2022). The harvesting of a seal and its distribution through culturally instituted sharing networks continues to be the basis of great celebration in communities, bringing families and communities together. The meat from one seal can feed several people for days. It is through hunting that Inuit express their identity, togetherness, and cultural survival.

2. COSEWIC consultation

Any research conducted in the Arctic needs to incorporate a sensitivity towards Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit and should strive towards an inclusive research partnership with Inuit. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, Article 5.1.2h (Principles) recognises and reflects that “there is a need for an effective role for Inuit in all aspects of wildlife management, including research” (NLCA 1993). The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)’s 2018 *National Inuit Strategy on Research* states that Inuit need to be included “in the governance of Inuit Nunangat research [as it] is necessary to improve the efficacy, impact, and usefulness of Inuit Nunangat research activity” (p. 16). Indeed, the 2006 *A Guide for Researchers* published by ITK and the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI), already expressed, amongst variety of concerns, “that there is a lack of input/consultation in identifying research needs” and “a lack of local involvement in the research process” (ITK and NRI 2006, p. 2-5). On an international level, the necessity to acknowledge Indigenous Knowledge, such as Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit, is also emphasised in the legally binding agreement of the Arctic Council. *The Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation* states in Article 9 (Traditional and local knowledge) that:

1. The Parties shall encourage Participants to utilize, as appropriate, traditional and local knowledge in the planning and conduct of Scientific Activities under this Agreement.
2. The Parties shall encourage communication, as appropriate, between holders of traditional and local knowledge and Participants conducting Scientific Activities under this Agreement.

3. The Parties shall encourage holders of traditional and local knowledge, as appropriate, to participate in Scientific Activities under this Agreement (Arctic Council 2017)

While we do not want to undermine the detailed work done by the authors of the 2019 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Ringed Seal, we do note that the report does not meet the research needs and standards encouragement as advised and promoted by the political bodies and research institutes mentioned above (e.g. ITK). To illustrate this point and of note, out of the eleven Authorities Contacted only two are Inuit Knowledge Holders (or just 18%). Furthermore, two of the Inuit Knowledge Holders' acknowledged were speaking directly to "the potential impacts of cruise ship tourism in Nunavut" rather than the assessment and status of the Ringed Seal. A similar imbalance can be found when we look at the Information Sources. While we applaud the authors for bringing in community reports and some Inuit-authored sources, the vast majority of the sources have been produced by non-Inuit. We acknowledge that the authors have included Inuit harvesters' knowledge on types of seal (section Designatable Units), seal predation (subsection Predation), seal health (subsection Diseases), seal population (subsection Canadian (and Adjacent Areas) Population Estimates and section Fluctuations and Trends). But these inclusions are brief and sporadic. The report, thus, provides a biased view on Ringed Seal with a heavy Western scientific lens. The lack of extensive engagement with Inuit Knowledge Holders and Inuit Qaujimagajatuqangit, hence, does not provide a full perspective of the importance that Ringed Seals have for Inuit. The authors' recognition to this importance is a one sentence reference the previous COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Ringed Seal (Kingsley 1990). As they write: "Ringed Seal is a very important food source for Inuit and their dogs, although their use as a source of fuel (oil) and clothing (furs) has declined (Kingsley 1990) (COSEWIC 2019, p. 7)." The next paragraph of two sentences, with outdated literature, however, strongly emphasizes on economic aspects of seal pelts.

Seal pelts are still an important source of income for Inuit harvesters throughout the Canadian Arctic and subarctic. Seal hunting remains an important socio-economic activity (McLaren 1958b; Wenzel 1987; Pelly 2001; Furgal *et al.* 2002) even though sales of pelts to the Government of Nunavut Department of Environment's Fur and Seal Program have declined (Ghazal pers. comm. 2017) (COSEWIC 2019, p. 7).

That is all that is included in the report about the significant importance of Ringed Seal for Inuit. In the below pages we will provide a much more extensive Inuit perspective from several community-members of Mittimatalik and Kinngait.

Moving away for now from the limited contribution of Inuit on assessing the status of the Ringed Seal, there is another pressing issue with the 2019 report: language. The 2019 report and the consultation questionnaire are only available in English and French, there are no Inuktitut versions. While acknowledging that English and French are the official languages of Canada under the 1985 Official Languages Act, we also underscore the exceptions under the same Act for the Legislature of Nunavut. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement sets out the legal obligations of various institutions to include Inuktitut in written or oral documentations as an official language in Nunavut. We are aware that these obligations fall short of a legal requirement to have DFO reports, such as the 2019 COSEWIC report, translated into Inuktitut. But we also want to illuminate the quasi-constitutional status in law of the 2008 Inuit Language Protection Act. The Inuit Language Protection Act considers the importance of the Inuit Language:

- (a) as a cultural inheritance and ongoing expression of Inuit identity both in Nunavut communities and in the wider circumpolar world,
- (b) as the fundamental medium of personal and cultural expression through which Inuit knowledge, values, history, tradition and identity are transmitted,
- (c) to the development of the dynamic and strong individuals, communities and institutions in Nunavut that are required to advance the reconciliation contemplated by the Nunavut Agreement,
- (d) to support the meaningful engagement of Inuit Language speakers in all levels of governance and in socio-economic development in Nunavut, and
- (e) as a foundation necessary to a sustainable future for the Inuit of Nunavut as a people of distinct cultural and linguistic identity within Canada.

The importance of providing documentation in Inuktitut is clearly visible in numbers provided by Statistics Canada (Lepage and Langlois, with collaboration of Turcotte 2019). In 2016, over half of the population (65.3 %) considered Inuktitut as their mother tongue (of which 97.4% considered Inuktitut as their mother-tongue). Even though the statistics show that most Inuit are bilingual in Inuktitut-English (82.3%), it also shows that not all Inuit are versed in the English (or French) language. When we look by age-group, the figures are starker. Only 59.7% of those 65 years and older are bilingual Inuktitut-English speakers and only 60.2% of Inuktitut speakers have knowledge of English. In short, the majority of Elder Inuit Knowledge Holders, and who are of pivotal importance in Inuit culture, are not proficient in the English language. Following the Inuit Language Protection Act that considers “to support the meaningful engagement of Inuit Language speakers in all levels of governance and in socio-economic development in Nunavut”, and in accordance with the ITK’s National Inuit Strategy on Research, the unavailability of an Inuktitut version of the 2019 COSEWIC report and the Ringed Seal consultation questionnaire leads us to suspect that elder Inuit Knowledge Holders cannot engage meaningfully with the consultation. COSEWIC seems to be aware of the importance of Inuktitut in the Arctic, and we applaud that the Consultation information sheet is trilingual with an Inuktitut version. But this also raises a serious question why the consultation questionnaire is only bilingual English/French and excludes Inuktitut and why the 2019 COSEWIC report is only bilingual English/French and therefore denies the proper engagement of monolingual Inuktitut speakers? Turning to the Inuktitut-version of the Ringed Seal Information Sheet, it is also disconcerting that there is not an embedded link included in this version that directs the reader to the English or French questionnaire (as is the case in the English version). Instead, the Inuktitut information sheet has a hidden embedded link - in the box – that leads to a defunct link of Survey Monkey Survey with a message in English that says “This survey is currently closed. Please contact the author of this survey for further assistance.”

Language is not the only barrier that many community-members may face in Nunavut but also a digital divide. Not all households can afford internet service, and even if they can, many more elderly Inuit Knowledge Holders are not confident IT users. The online questionnaire, thus, might work well for younger generations – provided they have access to internet which can be intermittent in the Arctic – but excludes those Inuit without internet access or digital literacy. The apparent lack of printed copies of the consultation and the lack of public notification of the COSEWIC consultation on radio or community information boards is lamentable. Subsequently, the consultation does not reach all those people most reliant on seals and most impacted on a change in designation of Ringed Seal as a Species of Concern.

The consultation process, then, has been heavily critiqued by community-members who then feel that these wildlife management plans are imposed on them. Caleb Ootoova and Regilee Ootoova in Mittimatalik expressed this opinion most vividly.

Well, for people who don't live here and make rules and regulations, they are the ones who seem to impose a different lifestyle than what is required. What it means to be from Canada is to make rules and regulations for Canadians, although some Canadians are influenced by things that are not Canadian. And the values that are gained and the common sense that is acquired seem to be abandoned. It seems Canadians are influenced by outside sources. Canadians make legislation and break them. What it means to be a Canadian is that you grow up in Canada and we are in Inuit living in Canada, except the rules and regulations placed on us are made from outside sources.

Regilee continues and reflects on the COSEWIC consultation.

This consultation creates conflict within the Indigenous community, for example, polar bears. They became regulated, influenced by outside sources beyond Canada. And the influence came from people who have not seen the Arctic, have not lived in it, have not been here. And these people make the rules and regulations. And if we made their rules and regulations, there would also be a conflict there. They don't know the land, the environment and how people live. They even ask questions, a question like, where are you from? And I would reply from Pond Inlet and they would say, where is that? They don't know. These people who don't know, they make the rules and regulations. This does not sit right with me.

In sum, the COSEWIC consultation on Ringed Seals is lacking behind on the aforementioned guidance on research partnerships and language promotion in Inuit communities and instead takes a step backwards.

3. Ringed Seals as a source of Food or Clothing.

Ringed Seals are an important source of food for Inuit throughout the year. Joshua Katsak from Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) explains the seasonal cycle of Ringed Seal: it is hunted almost all year-round “from the summer to springtime and from the summertime even to the time that they were moulting”. Other times hunting would be impossible: changes in the weather, bad weather, times when snow piles up to make iglu, or when ice was too thin to travel in late fall. The times when seals were not caught were the times that people faced hardships and sometimes hunger. Springtime hunting, therefore, was and continues to be particularly important. Joshua Katsak explains that even though there were no laws or regulations, hunters would hunt as much as it was manageable for them. “Elders would organize and manage hunting”. The Elders would decide how many seals could be caught and when there were enough seals caught. A portion of the hunted seals would be cached for future use when food was scarcer.

Seal meat is not only important for Inuit consumption, it was also staple food for dogs owned by Inuit and important for clothing. Here is Joshua Katsak again:

The seal was used a lot. A whole part of the seal was used including the fat. Oil would be used for the qulliq and skins for the clothing. And if it's not being used for clothing

[then it is] to feed the dogs. There was nothing thrown away other than the bones. ... The stomach intestines, or whatever there was in the stomach, was used by the dogs but some of the intestines were also used by people as food. So, all the seal meat and fat and skin, especially the fat, sometimes there wasn't enough blubber. And if there weren't enough seals, and the dogs did not have enough seal meat for their food, they would include some other things other than seal meat for the dogs to eat. They would have additional meat set aside to be used as dog meat. ... But the seal ... was the main source of meat for people and there would be a lot of seals being caught.

Rhoda Katsak from Mittimatalik expands on the importance of seals for clothing and dog food.

I remember my mom every day working on seal skins. She was always making clothing, preparing different types of seal skins. Sometime, if she was preparing baby seal skins, they might be for selling at the stores. We'd cache some of the seals, we'd cover them over with rocks, to store them for dog food for the winter. This was because we lived with our dogs, and they were the only source of transportation. So, a lot of effort was made to make sure that the dogs had something to eat over the winter, food that people weren't using. And it was not just our family, it was grandpa's family as well that needed all this dog food.

The presence of seal meat and seal skins are also pivotal for continuing Inuit traditions. Mayor Jimmy Manning from Kinngait explains:

seals [are] not just for eating. They could be used for making good qamiit [seal skin boots], good qamiit for winter. And nowadays, the elders try and teach the young generation time to time now, you see, and that's keeping up the tradition that's very strong. That is, we want to see that more.

Sheila Katsak, reflecting on her childhood, remembers that the activity of chewing seal skins was "instilling a culture at an early age." A little later she adds that "if I had not grown up like that, I wouldn't like seal".

4. Seal and Well-Being

Regilee Ootoova from Mittimatalik, in May 2023, explains the importance of eating seal meat for her health.

When I don't have seal meat I kind of seem to be lost and be... I feel weak. I even feel different in my body. Because I grew up eating seal meat. I might have to move somewhere else if we stop hunting seal here. Just because I need the seal meat.

Rhoda Katsak recounts that store-bought cannot replace country food for economic and health reasons. As she exemplifies:

One of the biggest reasons for us to eat country food is that the meat that we get in the stores here is very old, like it's been frozen for a month and it's also very expensive. Especially nowadays, beef is very expensive and a lot of us are not pork eaters. The other thing about the country food is that the food that you buy from the South, I am just talking about meat or even fruit or vegetables, it doesn't keep you warm. People here sometimes say that when they have these kind of [store-bought] meals, they'll be full for about two hours at most and then get hungry again. Whereas the country food

can keep you satisfied longer than two hours, maybe six hours or more because you're getting vitamins from the fresh meat and you're also getting the kind of fat that is needed for this temperature [in the Arctic]. If you don't eat [seal] blubber, if you don't eat oil from the animals or the fat, you get very cold. When you go to the nursing station, and you feel nurses touching your body with their icy hands, it's because they're not eating the oil from the animals [like seal]. We need the warmth you get from eating maktaaq [whale skin and blubber] because of our climate. It's cold, we need that heat in our bodies to stop us from freezing over. Country food is very valuable that way, for keeping us warm out in minus 30 or allowing us to be out there on the land all day whatever the weather. Also [country food is] very fresh which is a big difference from store-bought food.

The absence of seal meat also has an impact on social cohesion. Joshua Katsak explains how a quota for ringed seal will be detrimental for the family unit, for young male hunters, and for his community at large. In his words, 'not having sufficient food to eat will damage the family, damage family unity'. He illustrates his point: if there is no seal meat to share, this will destroy family relations.

Indirectly, this point Josh Katsak makes about sharing is also echoed by Mayor Jimmy Manning from Kinngait. He recalls the days when he would invite people over for a seal feast. If there is less seal meat in Kinngait, those moments of sharing and maintaining social cohesion will weaken,

These notions of sharing are pivotal for social cohesion and community wellbeing.

5. Movement in Seal Population

There are differences between Mittimatalik and Kinngait when it comes to analysing some of the localized effects on Ringed Seals populations. Mayor Jimmy Manning from Kinngait considers global warming and the presence of Killer Whales as a reason that there are fewer Ringed Seals in Kinngait area. As he states in an interview with the IFSNu team:

And one of the reasons that maybe some of the ring seals are not so plentiful in our area anymore is, we think that, you know, maybe perhaps of global warming, maybe the food is not there for them anywhere, so they tend to kind of move the way. We want to think that way sometimes. And just kind of recently, over the last few years, we started to see Killer Whales that we did not use to see in the area. And maybe perhaps more Killer Whales in the area. Maybe the Ringed Seals are going somewhere else for their protection.

Joshua Katsak offers different reasons for a change in the Ringed Seal population. He explains that shipping, warming waters, Polar Bears and Arctic Foxes are the biggest reasons that Ringed Seals may be appearing in fewer numbers in the Mittimatalik area. As he explains in an interview with the IFSNu team:

There are way too many ships. That's one of the reasons. The other reason is that the water is getting too warm. The food that seals eat are found in colder climates now. ... Nowadays too, the seals don't seem to be as fat. ... And nowadays, more and more, when people cache their seals, the caches are eaten by polar bears. There are too many polar bears. So people are now saying that by caching our seals, we're just feeding the polar bears. The polar bears are taking them. Sometimes in other communities, the

polar bears are eating a lot of the seal pups. ... If there were too many foxes in the inlets where the seal pups are being born, sometimes we end up with a lot of foxes in these areas because because they know that's where seal pups are born.

At a later stage in the interview, Joshua returns to the shipping and warm water and its impact on seal population.

People are thinking that there are some critical changes to the seals because of the ships. ... When there are no ships around here and when there is less warm water, all of the animals start coming back to the waters around Navyboard Inlet. We have more animals when the ship traffic dies down. I am sure right now that seals are coming in later, in the fall and late fall. And the seals being caught are smaller. All the ships moving seem to have stopped. The seals show up again even though there didn't seem to be that many before.

6. Inter-community trade and sharing

Mayor Jimmy Manning from Kinngait shared:

Yes, when we're not getting plenty of seals, caribou, and other animals, we wonder why the seals are going away, and how we can find a way to get what we don't have anymore. We talked about, when we talk about country food, inter-settlement trade, you know, back and forth, that is okay, as long as the other end is okay with it, you know. I think that's the idea that the Nunavut Government, with other wildlife people, and the HTO [Hunters and Trappers Organizations], and these people, when they try to control protecting the animals, I think that was one of the ideas that was put out too [to allow inter-settlement trade]. I think it's as long as we protect our animals, take good care, make it understandable elsewhere, teach our children, teach our government, that is okay.

Rhoda Katsak, too, stresses the importance of sharing between communities and between those that have access to country food and those that do not have. She feels troubled and conflicted when orphans do not have access to country food. Store-bought food is too expensive as a replacement and not many people can afford to buy meat alternatives such as beef steaks in large households. She also points out that the income benefit system does not favour those that want to buy country food. As she explains in her conversation with IFSNu team-member Nancy Wachowich:

The other thing that's really strange about us is that people who cannot afford to go hunting, who cannot afford to have the hunting equipment, they're the ones with income support. ... But income support will not allow you to buy country food. ... Yeah. Income support will deposit your money at the northern or the co-op or your back. But the northern or the co-op, they don't sell country food. ... It's the hunters' and trappers' organization that sells country food. But you can't put your income support money there.

7. Food Sovereignty and Quotas

The author of this report, Sheila Katsak, states that

'Food sovereignty, for me, it is to assert a culture. It is to practice culture, to use culture, to use it every day. It is, deciding what is our right for Inuit'.

This sentiment is echoed by others who likewise are critical of quotas and any wildlife management that might flow out of the designation of the Ringed Seal as a Species of Concern. Quotas have a detrimental impact and can be in direct conflict with Inuit food sovereignty.

Mayor Jimmy Manning from Kinngait, for example, says that:

... the prices [for store-bought foods] are too high, and a lot of families can't afford to buy these anymore. So, it's very important that we have country food, and that having to have quota, sometimes don't really work because, you know, the Inuit, if they needed it, they're going to get it anyways, and they're allowed, and they should be allowed, you know. You know, nothing goes to waste. If they're going to abuse it and waste it, well that's another story. But, you know, quota system is not a Nunavut, what do I say, Inuit system, and our Elders, and we're kind of taught that, you know, you look after, you protect the animals, you don't waste it, you know, and then it's okay, and that's how we should be teaching our children, maintaining, you know.

Caleb and Regilee Ootoova express their anger about the quota system and that their lives are governed by outsiders. Caleb reflects on the impact that colonialism has had on Indigenous communities.

It has always been like that where the white man has the authority over Indigenous communities. And it makes me very angry. Anyone from the Indigenous community do not act like they are better than everyone else, even though they have the knowledge, the common sense and informal education, the kind of education that takes many years to obtain. And these people are governed by people who are not from their community.

Regilee continues the conversation:

We have a lot of things to say about the subject. We don't talk about the subject at all. But if we were to say what we have been thinking about, I think people would understand how hard it is to be Inuit.

Caleb - Yes, we would be understood.

Regilee - Well, now is the time to be understood. I would like to thank you for this project and be given space to say what we need to say. In regards to seal, it is a necessity for us. It provides us food and clothing. It is something that we value very much. It is something that keeps us warm because we live in an environment that is very cold. If we were to live in this environment and we no longer have a diet of seal meat and our reliance is solely on store-bought food, we would always be cold.

Our anger has been pent up and the anger of our ancestors was always also pent up. If our ancestors were angry, their anger would be greater and it would be valid. Even so, this anger we're feeling is valid. This is not how we want to live. It's not how we want to live at all. Seal meat will always be our food. It is something that gives us life, that gives us strength and warmth when we live in a place of cold environment. Thank you. We were able to say what we needed to say.

Joshua Katsak, too, explains that a quota will affect family unity and will lead to changing Inuit lifestyle. In a lengthily response, he underscores the impact that quotas already have had on the community and what a Ringed Seal quota would mean.

I believe it's going to be a big impact if we have any bans on our hunting of the seal. In the 1970s, when we had a quota on narwhals, Mittimatalik was given a quota of 100 narwhals from the spring to the fall. This quota system was very restrictive and a lot of us were trying to get tags. Rushing around, trying to be the first person to get those tags. It would have to be in the same situation that if we lived in a quota system for seals. And we've already had the same issues with the polar bear tags. Maybe we have almost 30 tags now for polar bears for a whole year. They are increasing the quota on the polar bears. This seal ban, if we were to have a quota on a seals, there would probably be a lot of people who are rushing to get to the quota number, wanting to be the first. I'm not sure if we would be able to follow the rules. In a way, even if we hear a lot about it, if we have no food, if we are out hunting another animal, like a narwhal or something, and we need to get food for that day, if we are not able to get fish. If seals are the only animals available. I think we could not tell anybody that we caught a seal if we had a quota system to hide our catch. If we had a ban on hunting seals, it would be devastating for the young people who are experts at seal hunting now. The young men have been growing up under a ban on caribou hunting. So they are experts at seal hunting. They would definitely be affected by any kind of quota, especially for those that are hunting seals now. They are very good at seal hunting. If they were now banned not to hunt in the seals, they would have to find other things to do, but that may not be too good for their lifestyle. They would have to try to go to a different type of activity, even if they don't have enough to eat and not enough sufficient food. It would damage the family and it would be a damage to family unity.

We would have to change our lifestyle. Not having enough food would destroy family relations. Not sharing makes a difference to the family unit. Even if there was a larger quota, it would still be difficult to share, even a small amount. If they gave us a small quota, it would be even more difficult. It would change our lifestyle, definitely! If there was a larger quota applied, then it would be okay. But we might need to get more jails because of a lot of lawbreakers! We would have to adopt a lifestyle different than what we are used to. We don't go over the Narwhal quota nowadays so it's not a concern anymore, the quota, not so much. Also with caribou, we have a quota now for caribou. If we have a quota a seals, and we run out of our quota, yes, we might be forced to break the law and do some hunting that is not legal. We would be learning to do our hunting secretly, without letting people know, hiding things from others and not saying anything. We would end up not sharing with other people because we are hiding what we got, and we are keeping it in our house. People could be hungry, and we would not be giving food to them, seal or anything, because we cannot show the meat that has been caught. We learned to break the law this way. This is what I could see happen right now, at the moment, just thinking about the quota system.

Food security is a significant issue in Inuit communities, as outlined in Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's (2021) *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*. In communities where food is already scarce, quotas for Ringed Seal risk increasing hunger and disrupting food sharing networks.

Rhoda Katsak picks up the impact that a quota could have on the young men who have become expert seal hunters and how it would impact the eating of country food.

I even noticed it myself too that when the caribou got scarce, like 10-15 years ago, the babies that were then didn't really learn to eat caribou. Even today, when you're trying to give them the caribou [meat] as opposed to seal or narwhal maktaaq, they prefer those rather than caribou because they weren't brought up eating caribou. Caribou meat was not available, so all of their interest was now geared towards learning how to seal hunt. The younger generation, the 20 to 25 year olds, right now they're seal hunting. They are experts at seal hunting, that's what my husband tells me. He says that those young men are way more experienced, even than him, they got very innovative about their hunting [skills]. They're very easy at finding the [seal breathing] holes and planning together and working together. [They have become experts] because they've spent most of their young life doing that rather than caribou hunting. Because they're all focused on the seal hunting. I could say exactly the same thing about my father-in-law. Now there was a man who was expert on caribou and he could tell you stories and stories about caribou in that area or that area: how they behave, where they are, where you could find them, and all that. That was his specialty. If you wanted a walking encyclopaedia on caribou that was him. But these young people, nowadays, they like seal hunting. You would be taking away a very exciting activity for them if you were to reduce or lessen [through a quota]. They're providing for the community ... [and] they're very proud of what they do. They're very excited about their ability to hunt seal or even narwhal for that matter because that's how they provide for the community. There's no caribou hunting, or so very little of it, [that] the same sort of groups of hunters they're becoming specialists in narwhal and in seals.

Conclusion

In the parody *Qallunaat: Why White People Are Funny* (Nungak), Inuk Elder John Amagoalik argues that words carry more weight than texts in Inuit culture. Our contribution, therefore, includes both this written document as well as a digital media version with the various Inuit Knowledge Holders and youth who contributed to this report.

As the various Inuit have expressed in our report, seals are of pivotal importance to Inuit for food, clothing, and well-being. They offer a variety of reasons why there are fluctuations in Ringed Seal population: increase in shipping, increase in polar bears, Arctic foxes, presence of Killer Whales, and warming of the sea water. These reasons are important to bring forth additional changes in shipping and the quota for polar bear hunting. Joshua Katsak from Mittimatalik, for one, makes a strong case that there are too many polar bears around Mittimatalik and that the hunting quota and number of tags issued needs to be raised. Contributors to this report, too, have underscored that country food cannot be replaced by store-bought food. For one, many people cannot afford to buy enough store-bought food to satisfy the needs of large households. Nunavut, and specifically Inuit households, experience the highest rates of food insecurity in Canada. The figures range from 70% households experiences food insecurity with a staggering 34% households of that designated as severe (Nunavut Food Security Coalition) to 57% in 2017-2018 (Leblanc-Laurendeau 2020).

The *Inuksiutit: Food Sovereignty in Nunavut* (IFSNU) project has been documenting the importance of country food. Amongst other foods, the IFSNU team has recorded the hunting and preparation of Ringed Seals. The documentation, and as this submission underscores,

irrevocably shows that Ringed Seals form an integral part in Inuit lives and that Inuit voices need to be included in much greater detail. The few sentences devoted to Inuit culture in the 2019 COSEWIC report does not suffice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contributing co-authors of this report are: Peter Loovers, Jessica Penney and Nancy Wachowich

The authors of this report, and the IFSNu research group, want to express their gratitude to the following contributors:

Sarahme Akoomalik

Jayko Aloolloo

Sipporah Aloolloo

Joshua Katsak

Rhoda Katsak

Sheila & Samantha Katsak

Moses Koonark

Jimmy Manning (Mayor Of Kinngait)

Caleb Ootoova

Regilee Ootoova

References

- Arctic Council. 2017. *Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation, signed at the Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, 11 May, 2017.*
- Boas, Franz. 1888. *The Central Eskimo*. S.I: Bureau of American Ethnology.
- Borre, K. 1994. "The Healing Power of the Seal: The Meaning of Inuit Health Practice and Belief." *Arctic anthropology* 31.1 1–15.
- 1991 "Seal Blood, Inuit Blood, and Diet: A Biocultural Model of Physiology and Cultural Identity." *Medical anthropology quarterly* 5.1 48–62.
- Condon, Richard G., Peter Collings, and George Wenzel. 1995. "The Best Part of Life: Subsistence Hunting, Ethnicity, and Economic Adaptation among Young Adult Inuit Males." *Arctic* 48.1 (31–46).
- Brody, Hugh. 1975. *The People's Land : Eskimos and Whites in the Eastern Arctic*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- ITK. 2021. *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami: Ottawa.
- ITK and NRI. (2006). *Negotiating Research Relationships with Inuit Communities: A Guide for Researchers*. Scot Nickels, Jamal Shirley, and Gita Laidler (eds). Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Nunavut Research Institute: Ottawa and Iqaluit. 25 pp.
- Katsak, Rhoda. 2023. personal communication
- Katsak, Joshua. Interviewed by Rhoda Katsak. 27 October, 2023
- Katsak, Rhoda. Interviewed by Nancy Wachowich. 28 October, 2023
- Katsak, Sheila. Interviewed by Nancy Wachowich. 26 October, 2023.
- Katsak, Sheila, and Nancy Wachowich 2022. *Anaanavut Iisaijigiqaaqtavut Iliniarutigijavut Qisiliritigluttat: (Our Mothers, Our First Teachers: Lessons from Seal Skin Sewing)*. In, *Qummut Qukiria!: Art, Culture, and Sovereignty Across Inuit Nunaat and Sápmi: Mobilizing the Circumpolar North*. Hudson, A., Igloliorte, H., Lundström, J. (eds.). Goose Lane, pp. 395-407.
- Katsak, Sheila, Wachowich, Nancy. 2020. Working with nalua: the most delicate of seal skins. *Arctic: Culture and Climate*. Lincoln, A., Cooper, J., Looers, J. P. L. (eds.). Thames & Hudson, in collaboration with The British Museum, pp. 142-148
- Leblanc-Laurendeau, Olivier. 2020. *Food Insecurity in Northern Canada: An Overview*. Background Paper (2020-47-E). Ottawa: Library of Parliament
- Manning, Jimmy. Interviewed by Amy Caughey & Peter Looers, 27 October 2023
- Mathiassen, Therkel. 1928. *Material Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal

NLCA. 1993. Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Iqaluit: Government of Canada and Tungavik Federation of Nunavut.

Ootoova, Caleb. Interviewed by Sheila Katsak. 22 October 2023

Ootoova, Regilee. Interviewed by Sheila Katsak. 22 October, 2023.

Pelly, David. 2001. Sacred Hunt: A Portrait of the Relationship Between Seals and Inuit. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

Peter, Aaju; Ishulutak, Myna; Shaimaiyuk, Julia; Shaimaiyuk, Jeannie; Kisa, Nancy; Kootoo, Bernice & Susan Enuaraq. 2002. "The seal: An integral part of our culture." *Etudes Inuit* 26:1 (2002): 167-.

Rasmussen, Knud. 1929. *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1929. Print.

Sansoulet, Julie ; Therrien, Michèle ; Delgove, Joseph ; Pouxviel, Guilhem ; Desriac, Julie ; Sardet, Noé ; Vanderlinden, Jean-Paul "An Update on Inuit Perceptions of Their Changing Environment, Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island, Nunavut)." *Elementa (Washington, D.C.)* 8.1 (2020): n. pag.

Simonee, Natasha ; Aooloo, Jayko ; Carter, Natalie Ann ; Ljubicic, Gita ; Dawson, Jackie 2021. "Qanuippa? (How's the Weather?): Integrating Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit and Environmental Forecasting Products to Support Travel Safety around Pond Inlet, Nunavut, in a Changing Climate." *Weather, climate, and society* 13.4 (933–962).

Wachowich, Nancy in collaboration with Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, and Sandra Pikujak Katsak. *Saqiyuq : Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*. Montreal ; McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999.

Wachowich, Nancy. "Intimate Clips: Sealskin Sewing, Digital Archives and the Mittimatalik Arnait Miqsuqtuit Collective." *Museum anthropology review* 12.2 (2018): 75–99.
Wenzel, George W. *Animal Rights, Human Rights : Ecology, Economy, and Ideology in the Canadian Arctic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

Wenzel, George W. 2014 "The Meaning of Ice: People and Sea Ice in Three Arctic Communities, Edited by Shari Fox Gearheard, Lene Kielsen Holm, Henry Huntington, Joe Mello Leavitt, Andrew R. Mahoney, Margaret Opie, Toku Oshima and Joelle Sanguya." *Arctic* 67.1 (2014): 117-.

Wilson, Katherine J. ; Arreak, Andrew ; Itulu, Jamesie ; Ljubicic, Gita J. ; Bell, Trevor " "When We're on the Ice, All We Have Is Our Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit": Mobilizing Inuit Knowledge as a Sea Ice Safety Adaptation Strategy in Mittimatalik, Nunavut." *Arctic* 74.4 (2021): 525–549.