LANCASTER SOUND

As an area of plentiful resources, it has been important and it will remain important to the Inuit

In discussion with Muktar Akumalik, Qapik Attagutsiak, Koonoo Uyukuluk and members of the Arctic Bay Inuit Knowledge Working group.

Simultaneous interpretation and additional translation by Kataisee Attagutsiak.

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Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet are 2 communities associated with Sirmilik National Park. Arctic Bay (also referred to as Ikpiarjuk) is located on the northern shores of Baffin Island, on the Borden Peninsula and Pond Inlet (also referred to as Mittimatalik) is located to the east overlooking the waters of Eclipse Sound. As part of the Inuit Knowledge Project of Parks Canada and under the guidance of both the Pond Inlet and Arctic Bay Inuit Knowledge Working Groups, we have been able to travel on the sea ice with elders, hunters and youth to visit some of the places in and around Sirmilik National Park that are central to their life, history and traditions.

In May 2008, we travelled by snowmobile on the sea ice from Arctic Bay north along Admiralty Inlet to the floe edge on Lancaster Sound. We set up tents on the ice near Umiarjuannguaq, an area where both Qapik Attagutsiak and Muktar Akumalik lived. Qapik was born in 1917 near Repulse Bay and moved to the Arctic Bay area where she raised her family. Inuit at that time had to move where the animals were in abundance; living off the land and travelling with dog teams. Qapik and her eldest daughter Kigutikarjuk Shappa are advocates for traditional midwifery, mental health, and Inuit health and are often invited to lecture at southern universities. Muktar was born in 1932 near Ahiaq, Baker Lake. He and his family moved to Arvaaqtuut, north of Arctic Bay, in 1947 from Igloolik to wait for his father to return from the Hamilton Tuberculosis Sanitorium. His father never returned and Muktar and his family stayed in Arvaaqtuuq where they lived in sod houses and tents for 25 years. He has an in-depth knowledge of the area and was involved in the establishment negotiations for Sirmilik National Park.

Following the trip, all members of the Arctic Bay Inuit Knowledge Working Group reviewed the maps that were produced and discussed in more detail the nature and location of the many travel routes crisscrossing the land and sea areas. Muktar Akumalik, Kigutikarjuk Shappa and Koonoo Uyukuluk spoke about their knowledge of and connection to Devon Island as well as the ecological and cultural importance of Admiralty Inlet and Lancaster Sound. Here is a summary of our discussion.

Inuit have traditionally used the area included within Sirmilik National Park and also the area between the north shore of Baffin Island and Devon Island. That area, now known as Lancaster Sound is a very significant area for Inuit and has been for many generations. A large part of this area is now included in a proposal for a marine conservation area. Kigutikarjuk comments on the proximity and accessibility of the area.

The Inuit never used to say that the area was too far as long as they had enough dog food, the area was not too far if they wanted to go hunting. I remember our father, they went polar bear hunting to Devon Island because this area (Arctic Bay) did not have that many polar bears at that time. There were three dog teams, they went polar bear hunting, my mother has a picture of the polar bear skins. They had caught those polar bears on the Devon Island sea ice. [A11 - 00:22:25 Kigutikarjuk Shappa in translation]

Inuit have been going to that area for a very long time. When our ancestors were traveling with the dog teams, when conditions were right and the sea ice was calm, they would go to that area to hunt and live off the land or live off the sea. Travel conditions had to be right. It could be a difficult area to travel to and return safely; there are polynia, leads and large areas of open water. One requires an intimate knowledge of the area to be able to go there safely. [*A11 - 00:21:11 Kigutikarjuk Shappa in translation]*

As an area of plentiful resources, it has been important and it remains important to the Inuit currently living there. They are strongly committed to ensuring the persistence of all wildlife species and their traditional harvesting activities. Koonoo and Muktar relate their views on this.

I do not really want the area to be taken away because there are animals like walrus, narwhals, muskox and this summer someone has caught three caribous in that area. The animals in that area are very important to us. We hunt them as well, the walrus, the muskox those kinds of animals are the ones that we would not want to be taken away from us. [A10 - 00:25:35 Koonoo Uyukuluk in translation]

Us from the Arctic cannot have farm animals. Our sea is like our farm, just like people have farms on the land. We don't want it to be taken by anyone, we don't want it to be destroyed by anyone from the outside we don't want our land to be disturbed so our animals can stay on our land. It is our responsiblity to look after our land properly. We have to advocate for it. If we don't look after it ourselves, the animals will start disappearing that is why it is imperative for us to look after it properly. [PCES 37:19-38:10 Muktar Akumalik in translation*]*

Muktar recalls meetings in the 70s when people came to the community to talk about oil exploration in Lancaster Sound – this was before Qikiqtani Inuit Association, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and Nunavut. In those years, people were concerned about the potential impact of the exploration on their animals. They were concerned about ship safety from the numerous icebergs and potential environmental impacts associated with the drilling and shipping activities. At that time - all agreed that they had to advocate for the protection of the environment.

We have to do our part in protecting our environment – it is our life it, it is our livelihood. [A11 - 00:42:06 *Muktar* Akumalik in translation]

At the same time, the Government of Canada was also interested in establishing a park in the region and park staff started coming to the community. Muktar and Levi Kalluk were selected to represent Arctic Bay in these establishment meetings. They travelled to Pond Inlet to meet and advocate for the protection of the land and Lancaster Sound. In those meetings, they realised that Park staff were also interested in the protection of the area and that they could help the Inuit protect their land and hopefully the sea - that is how the meetings went. Muktar and Levi 's position was supported by the community.

We had community meetings and everybody came up and voiced their concerns. Everyone was concerned about their animals and their hunting grounds. [A11 - 00:53:21 *Muktar* Akumalik in translation]

The meetings resulted in an agreement on the park boundaries and although Devon Island was recognized as an important area – in the end - it was excluded but all agreed that conservation and protection was preferable to development. Potential environmental catastrophes associated with

spills, shipping and the unknown impacts on the movements and migration of narwhal were all concerns.

However, Muktar reminds us not to forget that this was in the 70's and attitudes have changed over the years.

This was at a time when there were many Inuit elders and traditional Inuit hunters – when the culture was very strong, when people were so rooted to their land. At that time, advocacy was very, very strong with the elders because their main concern was to protect the animals, their livelihood. (A11 - 00:59:41 *Muktar* Akumalik in translation)

Muktar worries that as the years go by, the youth are starting to live more like Qallunaaq (southerners) and their position on the environment is very different.

The youth today are starting to live more like Qallunaaq. Tthey are adapting to a newer environment where their lifestyle is very different. They are not as connected to the land. Their advocacy is weaker than when we advocated for and on behalf of our land and on behalf of our sea. So when you look into the future, the youth will not be advocating as strong because the youth today have adapted to a society where it is acceptable to live like Qallunaaq. They are forgetting how it is to live on the land, how we had to hold on to our animals, how we had to hold on to our livelihood. Their advocacy is much weaker. As time goes, there will be fewer elders to advocate on behalf of the land. (A11 - 00:59:41 *Muktar* Akumalik in translation)

Muktar believes that remaining connected to the past, to the ancestors, is a priority.

Holding on to our past, on to our ancestors should be the message, because that makes it (our advocacy) much stronger. It is better to advocate on behalf of Inuit that have a good grasp of our past, of our elders, because we did not come here today just by ourselves. There has been a plan for centuries done by our ancestors. They planned how they were going to survive on this land. They planned how they were going to preserve and protect every animal, land and sea. So those are the things that we have to hold onto and think about - our ancestors, our past - because they are the ones that lived the traditional laws. We should not jump from one generation to the next and start living a new way just because something different was just introduced. We need to remember that the whole purpose of our existence is the same as that of our ancestors. This is what we should remember when we advocate on behalf of Inuit, for their land, their sea and their animals. [A12- 00:12:59 Muktar Akumalik in translation*]*

Lancaster Sound is an area of plentiful resources which represents a much larger landscape and cultural heritage that has been important and will remain important to the Inuit of the region.

Our whole purpose is the protection of our ancestral heritage. Our traditional law is to make sure that we hear the voices of not only today - but those of our ancestors and their vision for the future (A11 - 1:08 *Muktar* Akumalik in translation)

The remarkable sense place held by Muktar, Qapik, Koonoo and the members of the Inuit Knowledge Working Group is strongly tied to the past, told in the present and used to guide future generations. We felt privileged to have spent some time with them on the sea ice, to learn about these places that mean so much to them. We are very thankful.

Muktar Akumalik, May 2009

Qapik Attagutsiak, May 2009

For more photos of the trip – please visit the Inuit Knowledge Project section of the Landscape Ecology and Community Knowledge for Conservation website at http://www.lecol-ck.ca/index.php?pid=56&mid=199&rid=15