The Sea Ice is Our Highway:
The Human Dimension of Arctic Change

2010 State of the Arctic Conference
17 March 2010, Miami
Duane Smith, President,
Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada)
ICC: Who We Are
155,000 Inuit live in the Arctic spread across Greenland, Canada, Alaska (USA) and Chukotka (Russia). The Inuit Circumpolar Council advocates for Inuit rights internationally.
The Historical Importance of Sea Ice to Inuit

Inuit are a marine people

Inuit communities are located on the coast or major waterways to the sea

Land use and occupancy – Sea ice has always been an extension of Inuit land

Full Extent of Inuit Land Use (in Northwest Territories only). Source: Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, 1976.
Despite the increased difficulty in finding and harvesting big game and sea mammals due to thinning and less predictable sea ice, Inuit communities are persistent in maintaining their traditional diets.

“The majority of my food I still get from the land, I still depend on all the fish that we get and different ways to prepare it. Whale meat and seal meat, geese.”

Moving to Follow the Game: Continued Importance of Traditional Diet
Hunting for subsistence requires a great deal of movement

Inuit follow the animals as far as needed in each season

Though many Inuit in Canada now use snowmobiles instead of dog teams, we are still out on the land and sea, travelling as far as needed to seek out the wildlife we rely on for subsistence.

The Sea Ice is Our Highway

Life in the Arctic is dependent on movement, and sea ice is integral to that movement.
Recommendation #1: Regulate Arctic Navigation

Increased access to Arctic Oil & Gas reserves?

Strict regulation is needed to protect water and air purity.

Special navigation routes and seasons are needed to protect wildlife habitat and migration patterns.

This applies to scientific and military vessels as well as commercial shipping.
Recommendation #1: Regulate Arctic Navigation

The Northwest Passage cuts directly through territories occupied by Inuit.


Strict regulation is needed to protect water and air purity.

Special navigation routes and seasons are needed to protect wildlife habitat and migration patterns.

This applies to scientific and military vessels as well as commercial shipping.
Inuit communities and hunting areas are found all along the Northwest Passage.

Recommendation #1: Regulate Arctic Navigation

Inuit communities and hunting areas are found all along the Northwest Passage.

Strict regulation is needed to protect water and air purity.

Special navigation routes and seasons are needed to protect wildlife habitat and migration patterns.

This applies to scientific and military vessels as well as commercial shipping.
Recommendation #2: Support Inuit Adaptation

Inuit are creative, courageous, and determined to adapt as we have adapted for millennia.

But we need support to meet the challenges of climate change in ways that suit our unique culture.
Inuit are creative, courageous, and determined to adapt as we have adapted for millennia.

But we need support to meet the challenges of climate change in ways that suit our unique culture.

Many Inuit communities such as these three in Alaska are suffering rapid coastal erosion and may have to relocate.

Recommendation #2: Support Inuit Adaptation
Inuit are creative, courageous, and determined to adapt as we have adapted for millennia.

But we need support to meet the challenges of climate change in ways that suit our unique culture.

**Recommendation #2:** Support Inuit Adaptation

Quotes from Inuit hunters interviewed in March 2008:

“Then we'll use other equipment. People will still hunt. It's part of our life. When things change, you just have to go with it.”

“I'm still going to depend on harvesting, different species if it has to be...You just change with the changes, I guess... As long as I'm alive I'll keep doing what I'm doing.”

“A buddy of mine is into making little sleds out of aluminum, which you can use as a little kayak or boat. It's combined as a little sleigh and, if you have to, you can use it as a boat. That's one way I can adapt.”
Inuit have the right to be at the table when decisions are being made about our homeland.

Oceans Five countries discussing “Who owns the Arctic?” “How can we resolve disputes among us regarding the Arctic Ocean?”

Inuit should be part of those discussions

Recommendation #3: Remember the Human Dimension of the Arctic
Next Steps:

• Recognition that marine resources are a common resource
• Commitment to develop a coordinated approach to better understand the Arctic ecosystems
• Development of stringent regulations that adopt a precautionary approach
• Prioritization of sustainability and subsistence use
The Sea Ice is Our Highway: The Human Dimension of Arctic Change

2010 State of the Arctic Conference
17 March 2010, Miami
Duane Smith, President, Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada)