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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Could we get started?

I don't know if you can hear us in Whitehorse right now.

A voice: Yes.

The Chair: Excellent. We're expecting Joe Linklater. Is he on his way?

A voice: I haven't heard from him.

The Chair: What we'll do is get started. We have another witness joining us here via video conference as well. We have a little committee business to deal with.

We'll get started with the other witness, Duane Smith. When Mr. Linklater comes in, we can get him to read his statement, so you can brief him on how we'll proceed because we only have an hour and we probably need to get going. Does that sound okay, to you?

A voice: That's fine.

The Chair:Excellent.

Mr. Smith, just before we get started, we have a member here who wants to read a motion into the record. That will take us about 30 seconds. I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Dewar and then we'll come back, Mr. Smith, with your opening testimony, and we'll proceed like that.

Mr. Dewar, I turn the microphone over to you.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the patience of our witness.

I want to table a motion. It's relative to our study on the Arctic. We'll hand this out to members. We'll be dealing with committee business later and perhaps we'll deal with it then. The motion reads:

That, as part of its study on Canada's objectives at the Arctic Summit, the committee invite Ambassadors of Arctic Council member states to present their governments' priorities for the Arctic to the committee through appearing before the committee or making a written submission.

I just want to put that notice of motion and perhaps we can deal with it later in committee business.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Sure, we'll deal with it later. Thank you very much.

Why don't we get started then. We have Duane Smith who's the president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council.

We want to welcome you, sir. You have the floor. We'll give you 10 minutes to make your opening statement. Then over the next 55 minutes we'll move back and forth between the government and the opposition to ask questions with regard to your testimony.

Mr. Smith, why don't you introduce yourself and give us your opening statement, please.

Mr. Duane Smith (President, Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada)): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do apologize, first of all, for not being able to make it there due to my own schedule and previous commitments. I thank you, the committee and you yourself, for the opportunity to speak with you on this important matter.

My name is Duane Smith. I'm the president and vice-chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council. I represent the Inuit of Canada internationally.

I have provided you with a brief background in regard to some of the activities ICC, as we're commonly referred to, has been involved in, especially ICC Canada.

I've provided you with copies, and I apologize because I understand that they haven't been provided in time to make copies for all of the members of the committee in both English and French. I was only able to provide them to you in English. Your staff has kindly informed me that they will have it all translated and provided to you.

I do strongly recommend that, if you have the time, you review these documents. The first one is "A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic", and the second is "A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat".

I did not prepare a detailed presentation to you, Mr. Chair. My understanding was that I was being requested to sit in front of the committee to have a dialogue on Canada's Arctic policy. I think it would be much more informative for us to have this discussion, for me especially, to get some insight in regard to Canada's views on how we can move forward together on these things.

Most of you, I would assume... I apologize for some of my wording, but the Inuit Circumpolar Council represents Inuit from Chukotka, Russia; Alaska, United States; Canada, of course; and Greenland, Denmark.

We have about 155,000 Inuit who reside in these regions. We are a part of the Arctic Council as a permanent participant. We are also a part of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, where at this time we represent the Arctic seat on that forum. There are seven other indigenous representatives that sit on this body, along with eight government representatives.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council, again, represents the interests of the Inuit, as well as other northerners when it comes to broader, more general issues that may reflect on the well-being, and the issues that are of relevance to people within the Arctic.

I will leave it at that, Mr. Chair. As I said, I think that if we entertain some dialogue among ourselves, it'll be much more informative for me.

• (1110)

The Chair: Could I ask you to give us a couple of initial thoughts on what you guys support? Perhaps you could tell us some of the things you are looking at or have been involved in, just to help frame some of the questions from our members a little bit better. Could you maybe informally give us a couple of paragraphs on that? That may help frame the discussion for us as well in terms of where you're coming from. Would that be helpful?

Mr. Duane Smith: Yes, of course. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that direction.

I would refer to Canada's Arctic foreign policy initially. I would hope it's a living document that Canada will continue to review and update and keep reflective of what Canada's views and policies are within the Arctic.

If you look at the document, one thing is that the human dimension only comes in on page 22 of this document, which is near the end. I would hope and think that Canada would consider moving that up to be a higher priority, to reflect that in the document in the future when it gets reviewed, so that it's understood not only by the residents but by the broader audience that the human dimension within Canada is the first and foremost priority.

Also, the Inuit Circumpolar Council is highly involved in quite a number of issues, not only human rights issues wherever they may be, but also issues with regard to activities such as the contaminants and the long-range pollutants.

Some of you may be aware that the Inuit Circumpolar Council works very closely with the Government of Canada in regard to what is referred to as the dirty dozen in the Stockholm convention, and how that was resolved. That was a significant milestone not only for Canada, but for the ICC as well, to get that recognized and to regulate those pollutants. As we speak on a daily basis, more and more pollutants are put on this list to be regulated to minimize the negative effects they may have on the environment.

We also are involved in a variety of contaminant projects and issues. I must point out that the way the Inuit view these issues, especially contaminants entering the ecosystem, is that we see ourselves as a part of the ecosystem. We were actively involved in the international negotiations on the mercury treaty that was recently signed and agreed to by a vast majority of the countries around the world.

It's important to us because these types of heavy metals and contaminants that enter the ecosystem also enter into us, because we try to live in a sustainable manner within the ecosystem around us. That's one of the highlights that I would think Canada would emphasize to the broader audience, because it is in our interest, not only as Inuit, but as Canadians, to try to reflect a sustainable use perspective of the ecosystem around us as much as we can. It's part of our culture, it's in our nature to do so.

I reflect on that because of the various recent international...or other nations trying to infringe on our processes and our approaches in regard to the sustainable management and use of various species, such as seals, and such as polar bears more recently. On occasion, walrus are considered also. I point this out because this is not something we take lightly within the Inuit world. It's reflective of our culture. To have statements that these species are endangered and they're going to be either extirpated within certain regions or countries, or totally exterminated altogether, is the last thing we would want to see.

I use the polar bear as an example. There have never been more polar bears running around on the earth, and it's primarily because of sustainable management. Canada has the vast majority of polar bears in the world and manages them very closely with the respective regional Inuit organizations that have that mandate and responsibility within their land claims.

I'm trying to point out the sustainable use of the ecosystem, but also the importance of minimizing the negative effects of contaminants and heavy metals within the ecosystem, because they also enter into us and affect our health and our well-being.

• (1115)

So that's a very quick overview on two very crucial issues, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith. We appreciate that.

With that context in mind we're going to start with the opposition. We have Mr. Dewar, for seven minutes.

Mr. Dewar, the floor is yours.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

Thank you to our witness for getting up early and for providing us with some context as to our study on the Arctic.

I want to just take a minute. You had mentioned a couple of documents: "A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic", and also on resource and development principles.

If I may, I'll start with the "Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic", which you signed onto. I was really impressed with the thoroughness of the document and the perspective. Often when we hear of sovereignty, some people have a certain view of what sovereignty means, certainly here in the south, and I would be interested in your comments about it in the north. In particular, in the document, 3.2 reads:

The actions of Arctic peoples and states, the interactions between them, and the conduct of international relations must give primary respect to the need for global environmental security, the need for peaceful resolution of disputes, and the inextricable linkages between issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic and issues of self-determination.

There is another component of this declaration that I think is important, and it is that there is a pressing need for enhanced international exchange and cooperation in relation to the Arctic.

We're studying the Arctic because, as you know, Canada is taking over the chair of the Arctic Council. Where you had defined sovereignty, you really have put an emphasis on a multilateral approach as it relates to people. Taking from the declaration you have here, I wonder if you can give us some specific things that you think we should be putting on the agenda, as chair of the Arctic Council, as it relates to your declaration.

• (1120)

Mr. Duane Smith: May I respond, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Most definitely, sir, go ahead.

Mr. Duane Smith: Thank you.

Thank you for emphasizing that declaration. Yes, of course this is a key document that the Inuit Circumpolar Council continues to refer to on occasion. It's referred to not only by ourselves, but also by the Arctic Council. It has also been highlighted at the United Nations.

As you suggest, it's a way for people to try to seek resolution in a peaceful manner, to come to some sort of understanding and arrangement, agreement on how to move forward to meet the best interests of everybody.

In regard to trying to point out some specific areas within the document itself, there are five points right after the section you read that reflect on Inuit as partners. Instead of reading each and every one of those out, I would just point out that we as Inuit see ourselves working not only with Canada but with other organizations, other states, and other countries as well in regard to dealing with sovereignty issues.

We're not saying that...or we're not a part of any state of anything. We're trying to come up with a process where we, as a specific group of indigenous people, want to work with all parties that have an interest. I'm trying to come up with wording to move forward in regard to how these other outside states have an interest within our backyards.

I look at the Arctic Council's structure as an example where we, as the Inuit Circumpolar Council, can sit right at the table and take part in an advisory role in the discussions and the deliberations that take place among the eight primary Arctic states. That's a consensus body. The Inuit Circumpolar Council, as a permanent participant, doesn't have a vote at that, but as I said, we sit at the table and we provide our perspectives and views in an advisory capacity.

Second—

Mr. Paul Dewar: If I may, sorry to interrupt, but I thank you for that. I think it might be helpful that we have both of the documents, the declaration on sovereignty in the Arctic and also the principles of resource development, as evidence for our analysts to take a look at.

As you mentioned, we could read them all, but the document's done and we can provide that for our study. Thank you.

Because you were referencing the input from Inuit, I want to ask about the other declaration, which was on resource development. I'm looking at point number 5 where it says "Inuit and others—through their institutions and international instruments—have a shared responsibility to evaluate the risks and benefits of their actions through the prism of global environmental security." You already touched on this in your presentation. Can you tell us why it is absolutely critical for Inuit to be involved when it comes to being stewards of the land and the environment?

Mr. Duane Smith: Both poles are considered as sinkholes in regard to atmospheric as well as ocean current dumping, if I can use that word. But that's where a lot of the atmospheric pollutants and contaminants rotate: it's within the Arctic. With the changing Arctic, we're living on the edge, the frontier, if I may, in regard to the changes that are taking place. We're seeing it and living it first-hand. For us to try to continue to adapt and live a sustainable life in a community within this part of the world where it's changing quite rapidly it does have these effects on us. We need to make people more aware of this, but we also need to develop strategies on working with each other on how to minimize such effects so that we can continue to have these sustainable communities within the Arctic.

• (1125)

The Chair: That's all the time we have. Thank you very much.

We're going to turn it over to Ms. Grewal, please, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Smith, for your time and your presentation.

The council and Arctic organizations have placed a priority on the inclusion of indigenous peoples of the Arctic in the process of developing this region. Their contributions have been viewed as very important, meaningful, and of course insightful. How can the Government of Canada further demonstrate their interest in, and dedication to, the inclusion and importance of indigenous peoples of the north?

Mr. Duane Smith: To some degree Canada and the other Arctic states are developing their own approaches. Some are further ahead than others in regard to working closely with indigenous peoples of the Arctic. I think just having this discussion and this dialogue with yourselves and the committee is one approach and one development that Canada undertakes in regard to its commitment to working closely with the indigenous peoples.

You're well aware that within the Inuit world of Canada there are four modern-day treaties, as they're referred to. The respective regional Inuit organizations have a constitutional responsibility, along with Canada, to work together on implementing those land claims. This addresses part of your question because it gives the process and the direction on how to move forward on certain issues, and not only in regard to resource development. There are processes that are established that ensure various environmental assessments are conducted with the involvement of the regional organizations. I refer back to the document that your colleague was referring to on resource development. It says that Inuit are open to development issues as long as we're respected and there's a process in place that respects us and involves us in those processes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: It has been mentioned at our committee that it was very important for the chair of the Arctic Council to be someone who has actually lived and spent their time in the Arctic. Do you agree with this sentiment?

Mr. Duane Smith: Well, coming from the north myself, it does reflect on Canada's commitment. It does reflect on Canada's wanting to have somebody with that knowledge and insight. It's beneficial to everybody in that regard. But it's how you put that framework together as well, and the mandate.

The incoming chair has been consulting with not only us but also the broader audience within the circumpolar Arctic in regard to its mandate in putting together that framework on delivering what Canada sees as its agenda within that two-year timeframe.

They're still developing that. They're still consulting and working closely, not only with us but with others, in revising and trying to reflect everybody's views and perspectives, all while trying to also be realistic in the agenda and the mandate and the timeframe to ensure that we can achieve some objectives within that.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Smith, in your opinion, how effective has the permanent participant mechanism been in ensuring that indigenous perspectives are reflected in the work of the Arctic Council?

Mr. Duane Smith: It varies among the permanent participants. The Inuit Circumpolar Council was created long before the Arctic Council to ensure that the Inuit view and the Inuit rights were respected. This organization was put in place to do that.

So within the Arctic Council framework, we're a part of that, yes, but it has limited success, I guess I would say, primarily because of the lack of capacity within the permanent participants to adequately be involved in various activities where they should be, and also recognizing that even the states sometimes have limited capacity on some of these issues.

Again, it's as much as we can do within that structure. If we had more capacity, then I think much more could be achieved within the work of the Arctic Council.

• (1130)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: What do you see as the proper kind of balance between economic development and the protection of the environment in the north?

As well, do you foresee a significant expansion in commercial business in the Arctic in the near or medium term? Where will that

increased activity mostly be seen in the Arctic? Could you tell us something about that?

Mr. Duane Smith: That's why I was reflecting on and pointing out the Inuit modern-day treaties or land claims, because they have their processes in place in regard to how development will proceed within those areas. This is also recognizing that some activities proceed much more rapidly than others.

You're asking me for my view on this. I would just say that the Inuit view in the past has been that, yes, we welcome development, but at a pace that can be managed in such a way that it has minimal effect on the environment and the ecosystem within that area, and at the same time remediating as it proceeds, so that we're also cleaning up behind ourselves at the same time as we're developing.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to Dr. Bennett.

Welcome to the committee. We'll give you seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I'd like to follow up on the question of my colleague opposite with regard to the effectiveness of the permanent participant mechanism and what you were suggesting in terms of capacity.

What would it take for there to be improved capacity for the permanent participants? Is that support that needs to come from all governments, or is it something that Canada should be helping with in a different way?

Mr. Duane Smith: Thank you for the question.

I think it's a little bit of both. It's not just the responsibility of Canada but the responsibility of the Arctic states, when the Arctic Council was created, to ensure that the permanent participants were meaningfully involved within the Arctic Council.

I would suggest that we would entertain having the ability for a few technical people. That's the extent of it. In regard to all of the research, the activities that are taking place within the Arctic Council, I can't go into each and every one of them because the magnitude and the scope of it has elevated so much in recent years due to increased attention, due to the mandate and the activities being undertaken within the respective states on the Arctic. But it would be good if we had a couple of technical people to assist us in ensuring we adequately covered these activities. I'm not suggesting that we would need a staff of 20 to 40 people; I'm just suggesting a few people to assist us in ensuring our views are considered within these activities.

I would also point out that the Inuit Circumpolar Council is much more active than others. Within the Arctic Council we're actually leading a couple of projects within one of the working groups under the Arctic Council. So it all depends on the capacity of the permanent participants as well.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Obviously part of the job of this committee is to make recommendations. So you would hope that in the report on Arctic policy, increased capacity, resources, and research capacity, particularly, would be part and parcel of supporting the permanent participants like you.

•(1135)

Mr. Duane Smith: Well, I would hope so, especially within this short timeframe, because not only Canada but North America.... The United States will be the chair right after Canada, so the Inuit Circumpolar Council takes the view that North America will also be dealing with this issue over the next four-year timeframe. If we want to ensure that the agendas of both of those chairmanships are achievable, then the Inuit Circumpolar Council, as resident within those two chairmanship regions, has the capacity to ensure a system in achieving those.

I would also suggest that it's the responsibility of the eight Arctic states as well. It shouldn't just be Canada or the United States. It's a process that's been under discussion for many years within the Arctic Council. The senior Arctic officials haven't been able to come up with a structure or formula to adequately address permanent participant involvement. Right now you have one indigenous organization that's suspended within Russia, and how do we deal with that issue, because they need to be there because they're recognized as participants, but they're not at this time.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I guess that's the question. I'm pleased to hear that the minister has been consulting, but I'm also a bit wary that sometimes this government's view of consultation is more like an information session.

On things as important as climate change, how will you ensure that the voices of indigenous people, the Inuit, are presented to the council and dealt with as a priority to the council while we have the chair?

Mr. Duane Smith: Coincidentally, I will be in Ottawa next week. I'm hosting a workshop under the Arctic Council, where I'm bringing Inuit and other experts from the circumpolar Arctic together to conduct a workshop in regard to their observations, their knowledge, what they're trying to do to adapt to the changing Arctic, what they see taking place within their communities, how it's affecting them. We want to document these as well as go out into the field to the degree possible where we can gather further first-hand information and knowledge within those communities and put it into a report, where, as you suggest, we would make the appropriate recommendations based on this information to the Arctic Council on how to alleviate the negative impacts of the changing climate.

That's one key example, and it's focused at this time on Inuit and experts within the Arctic who are knowledgeable about that issue.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In the present structure, as a permanent participant, are you able to put that forward even if Canada didn't put climate change as a priority?

Mr. Duane Smith: I do note that climate change, to some degree, is in the policy. But it's an agreed-upon activity project that's undertaken within the Arctic Council, which Canada is a part of. Not everybody is going to agree to the extent on every activity, but it's recognizing that certain things need to be conducted so that everybody can make a better informed decision on such things. If Canada agrees or not, I can't say, because this project was approved under the Arctic Council at the last chairmanship, and ICC is trying to deliver on that mandate within our schedule.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We've been visited by the European Union representatives. Do you have a view as to whether the

European Union or China, Singapore, should be granted permanent observer status, and whether they should be in the room or in some other little room?

•(1140)

The Chair: That's all the time we have, but I'll let you answer the question, Mr. Smith, if you would.

Mr. Duane Smith: Okay, I'll try to be very brief.

The EU itself is not a country and it's not a state. It's a group. They do have their own policies in place that actually conflict with not only our culture but the sustainable practices that Canada signed onto as well. But again, all we can do as the Inuit Circumpolar Council is advise the Arctic Council that we would like to see certain things changed by some of these applicants to reflect the practices and agreed-upon processes within the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council has signed on, as the eight Arctic states, in regard to various processes and understandings, and the observers are supposed to agree to that. So that's a question that still needs to be clarified.

In regard to the other applicants, there are of course human rights issues. There are key questions such as how they would proactively contribute to the mandate of the Arctic Council. The second pillar within every observer applicant is how they're going to work with the permanent participants. That's one question they continue to ignore answering when they have applied.

The Arctic Council is in the process of developing criteria in regard to observers, where observers will be periodically reviewed, on a regular basis, so that it's ensured they're taking part in the Arctic Council activities in a proactive manner.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith. That's all the time we have. We're over just a bit there.

Mr. Williamson, we're going to start the second round at five minutes per witness. Mr. Williamson, the floor is yours.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Smith. Thank you for joining us today.

I want to follow up with a little more precision on something you just said. You said that the EU has practices that conflict with the culture, and I believe you said "development". Could you tease that out a bit? What are you suggesting there?

Mr. Duane Smith: I don't recall saying "development", but what I was saying is that the Arctic Council has signed on to a process that reflects and recognizes the eight Arctic states' domestic practices. The EU has put a ban in place, even though it doesn't reflect the need to protect seals in this case, but it's a ban that has a negative effect not only on Canada, but on the cultural practices of the Inuit within Canada and the other regions. We'd like to see that resolved in a manner, as well as develop an understanding not only with the EU, if they were successful in their observer application, but with all of the observers in regard to how they would work closely with us in delivering the Arctic Council mandate.

Mr. John Williamson: I think it was in your initial notes that you talked about polar bears, or you referenced them, anyway. One of the things we're hearing on the news and reading about is a declining population. Yet, when individuals who are actually on the ground in the north are asked for their opinion, we get a different opinion altogether. What's your view on this question of the polar bear hunt and the numbers and the various views that are out there?

Mr. Duane Smith: As I stated earlier, there are more polar bears on this earth now than ever before. It's part of the management practices that not only Canada but the Inuit organizations have agreed to within their modern-day treaties for sustainable use and management. Canada has also signed onto recognizing the Inuit right to harvest those species as well as to exercise how they conduct those harvesting activities with others.

There are certain criteria, including that a harvest has to be conducted in a traditional manner, and so on. That has actually turned out to be a mechanism that's supportive of increasing the polar bear population, because if those hunts are unsuccessful, then an allocated tag is taken off the quota for that year and it cannot be used again. It's actually beneficial to have certain numbers allocated for that purpose because of the low success rate.

• (1145)

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you. I have one last question.

Do you think the Government of Canada should actively refute these findings, promote the polar bear hunt in a manner similar to what they've done for the seal industry, and be active on it?

Mr. Duane Smith: To some degree, Canada is. We have been working with Canada. Canada is overseas as we speak, along with many other Inuit organizations, in Thailand right now in regard to the CITES convention which is under way at this time. We're working together to try to lobby the various countries not to support the United States' proposal to list polar bears in appendix I.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Mr. Bevington for five minutes.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Duane. It's a pleasure to have you in front of this committee and to have your knowledge and understanding of the Arctic Council for us to temper our discussions here.

I want to go back to the participant funding, because I really do think that's one issue we need to clarify here.

In 2011, the Arctic Council ministers said that there needed to be a financial ability on the part of the observers to contribute to the work of the permanent participants. Has that been the case in the past with the observers that are now in place?

Mr. Duane Smith: No, it hasn't. That's part of the discussions and deliberations that are taking place in regard to the revised criteria for observers and the Arctic states themselves. As I said, there is no actual understanding or commitment of the Arctic states to provide financial support for permanent participant involvement either.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: So there's some work to be done there.

We talk about this Arctic Council agenda as though it's something that can shift gears dramatically. What's your experience with the Arctic Council? Are these issues things that come up in one year and continue, or is there sort of an ongoing process that we go through with these many very complicated issues that deal with the great changes that are taking place in the Arctic?

Mr. Duane Smith: As I said earlier, there has been quite an increase in the activities within the working groups of the Arctic Council. Those are the tasks undertaken within the working groups and approved by the Arctic Council itself. Also, there are increased attention, awareness, and activities not only by the Arctic states within the circumpolar Arctic itself but by others conducting research within the Arctic. There is collaboration with China, Korea, Poland, and India. These countries are all conducting research in the circumpolar Arctic to whatever degree possible.

When the Arctic Council was created, it had a mandate. To me, it's a body in its teenage years, if I could put it that way, regarding how it conducts its business and activities. As it gets more grounded, and it has a permanent secretariat now, it's going to become much more active. It's not only because of that. It's also because of the increased attention, awareness, and need for better understanding and more research that is required within the Arctic so that we can make informed decisions in the best interests not only of the residents but moving forward.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I agree with that. When the Arctic Council was set up 18 or 19 years ago there was no discussion about the opening of the Arctic ice. The fact that we were going to have an ice-free Arctic in the next few decades wasn't on the table then.

Do you sense that the greatest concerns throughout the Arctic, by most of the Arctic nations and by the permanent participants, have to do with questions on pollution and the change in the Arctic ice conditions? These things really need to be subject to international agreements.

• (1150)

Mr. Duane Smith: They're all part and parcel, these things. It's not just one issue or one subject; they're all cumulative. The Arctic Council is trying to raise that awareness. There's ocean acidification as well, and that's a key issue. There's going to be a big report from the Arctic Council reflecting the need for the world to act on this matter. But, yes, I couldn't agree more with the need for a more proactive approach on all of these matters.

The Chair: Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr. Smith, for appearing before us today.

I want to shift gears. In some of the previous discussions we talked about the enormous potential that the north has to offer. Specifically, I think right now there's some great work happening in Baffin Island, near Iqaluit or on the other side of the island, with the iron ore and the opportunities that exist for native peoples. I'm wondering what's the buzz in Iqaluit at this time. What's the talk among the young people as they see potential for employment, for some great training? Could you tell the committee about that?

Mr. Duane Smith: It's not only that one project. There are other activities, like mining, within the other parts of Canada's Arctic. Keep in mind that it's 40% of Canada's land mass. In my backyard there's one island that's the size of France.

Yes, there is a need. The vast majority of the population is under 22. There's a need for improved education and more employment. People want to work. They welcome development, and there is support for it. But people also want development to proceed so that it minimizes the negative impacts on the communities themselves. Development affects the social fabric of the community as well as the cultural practices. There is concern about all-year shipping and how it might affect the ice conditions that the people rely on for transportation during the winter months to get their nutrition.

So there's a balance that people are struggling with. But the important thing is to improve the educational standards within the Arctic and to improve the graduation rates. That improves the quality of life, not only for northerners but also for Canada as a whole. Employment is just one part of it.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: We had a former witness involved in iron ore mining, Tom Paddon. We heard some really exciting prospects; the opportunities are just tremendous. How has the mining company been in its dialogues with first nations people? How are the communications at this point? Are these things being addressed?

• (1155)

Mr. Duane Smith: I can't speak for first nations. The first nations will have to speak through an associate.

I know Mr. Paddon. He sits on the ArcticNet board along with me. Tom has lived and worked in the Arctic for many years. I think he has a better understanding than other companies on the approach that's required to get the support of the various Inuit communities. He's worked in northern Quebec, etc. There are other iron mining activities within that region also. I think he knows better than other mining companies regarding how to approach and work with Inuit communities.

I refer to the processes that are required within the respective Inuit land claims in those regions. The processes already lay out how consultation, economic opportunities, etc., among the mining companies, oil and gas, etc., will be developed within those Inuit regions.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That's all the time we have. We don't have any witnesses for the next hour. We have some committee business.

There's another round for the Conservatives. Does anyone have any follow-up questions before we wrap up?

Did you have a quick question, Ms. Brown?

Is that okay, Mr. Smith? Could we ask a couple of follow-up questions?

Mr. Duane Smith: That's fine, sir.

The Chair: Great.

Ms. Brown, you may ask your question and then we'll move to Mr. Bevington and wrap up there.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): I have a quick question, Mr. Smith. My apologies that I didn't hear all your presentation. I was coming from another meeting. It was on the other side of the river, so I was late.

In response to one of the questions, you did talk about coming to Ottawa next week. You are convening a round table. I wonder if you could tell us with whom and the objective of that meeting. Is that something you could share with us?

Mr. Duane Smith: As I mentioned, along with other experts from the respective regions of Alaska, Greenland, Canada, and Chukotka, I'm bringing Inuit expertise together in Ottawa to have a dialogue regarding the Arctic: changing climate conditions, the ice conditions, and how sustainable communities are trying to adapt, to gain a better understanding of how each of these regions and communities are trying to deal with such matters.

It's to learn from each other first and then to take that knowledge and information home to see if it will be applicable within our own backyards. It's also to document this as part of our requirements of this project within the Arctic Council. Moving forward in this workshop is the first step that will be undertaken.

Ms. Lois Brown: If I may respectfully ask, if anything comes out of that meeting that you would like to share with our committee, I'm sure we would like to see that.

Mr. Duane Smith: Thank you for that opportunity. I have also sent a report, "The Sea Ice is Our Highway", to the staff there so they can provide a copy of that to you. That is the first part of this project. What I'm undertaking now is a broader approach.

The first report was conducted strictly within Canada. The next part is the broader circumpolar Arctic, where other Inuit live as well.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brown.

We'll finish up with Mr. Bevington, for a quick question.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You would likely be the only one we've had in front of the committee so far who would be able to talk about what happened with the Russian participants from the position of the permanent participants. Perhaps you could give us a better insight into what happens with national politics when the Russians come onto the Arctic Council.

• (1200)

Mr. Duane Smith: You're referring to the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, commonly known as RAIPON. Their constitution apparently conflicted with Russia's and they were required to make an amendment to their constitution to comply with the country's constitution. In that case they were suspended from any activities until the assembly could hold an emergency meeting to consider making that amendment.

The Russian representative is supposed to be providing the Arctic Council with an update in a couple of weeks when we have our next Arctic senior officials' meetings on that status.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Smith, thank you very much for taking the time to be with us this morning.

We are going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to get out of video conference and then we're going to go in camera to discuss some future committee business.

Mr. Smith, once again, thank you very much, and have a great rest of the day.

Mr. Duane Smith: Thank you.

Just so you know I'm at the far end of the country, the far northwest. It's a balmy minus 49 with the wind chill factor today.

The Chair: I guess that means we'll stop complaining about the Ottawa weather that we're having.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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