

Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk, MP  
Chair, Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs  
Committees Directorate  
House of Commons  
131 Queen Street, Room 6-37  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

*Sent by email: [INAN@parl.gc.ca](mailto:INAN@parl.gc.ca)*

Dear Madam Chair,

**Re: The Committee's study of critical northern infrastructure projects and regional strategic infrastructure strategies in the context of possible federal support**

I regret that I was not able to appear in person before the Committee in Ottawa. I am pleased, though, to be able to share our comments in this submission.

For the benefit of Committee Members that are not familiar with our region, I will first provide some background on who we are and where we are from. I will then explain our perspectives on our infrastructure needs here in the Western Arctic.

**Background**

The Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) is located in the Western Arctic segment of *Inuit Nunangat* - or Inuit Homeland. Along with the other three Inuit regions, our modern treaties seamlessly span 38% of Canada's land mass and 50% of its coast. Despite the fact that we are organized into four separate regions, Inuit remain one people. We share a common language, culture and history.

The ISR includes the lands, ice and waters of the Mackenzie Delta, the Beaufort Sea and a portion of the Arctic Ocean. There are six communities within the settlement region: Aklavik and Inuvik are located along the banks of the Mackenzie River, and Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk and Ulukhaktok are located along on the coast of the Beaufort Sea. We thrive in the midst of an extreme and changing environment and we have shared jurisdiction over trillions of cubic feet of high-quality natural gas.

There are currently over 6000 beneficiaries under the Inuvialuit Trust, with Inuvialuit residing in the ISR, across Canada, and beyond.

Inuvialuit, through the Committee for Original People's Entitlement initiated land claim negotiations with the Government of Canada in 1970. This came in response to our limited influence in increasing development activity in our lands and waters. The *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* (IFA) was finally signed and given effect by the *Western Arctic (Inuvialuit) Claims Settlement Act* on June 25, 1984. The IFA was the first comprehensive land claim agreement settled north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel and only the second settled in Canada's history.

This Agreement is not just ours. It belongs to both Inuvialuit *and* to Canada. Under it, we each carry solemn obligations to diligently carry out its promises.

Our Agreement was intended to help provide legal certainty to the nation and to prospective developers with respect to our region, however the Inuvialuit (and by extension, Canada) are on the edge of geopolitical change. Increasing temperatures in the sea and air have seen the opening of the Northwest Passage and there is growing global demand for cleaner sources of energy such as natural gas. Using the IFA as a guide, the ISR needs to feature into Canada's long-term infrastructure strategy.

## **Inuvialuit Infrastructure Priorities**

### **Infrastructure and the IFA**

Section 1(b) of the IFA sets as a primary objective of the land claim the equal and meaningful participation of Inuvialuit in the Northern and national economy. Investments in this objective benefit Canada as much as they benefit Inuvialuit. Countries that have a development plan and strong "anchor infrastructure" for their frontier areas are less exposed to international interests.

In undertaking the infrastructure question that is before this Committee, Canada must reflect the obligations included in section 16 of the IFA regarding economic development and opportunity. These provisions were included because negotiators acknowledged that one of the main drivers of capacity-building is the opportunity to work. As the IFA belongs to Canada and Inuvialuit alike, we look forward to working proactively with the federal government to implement its objectives and ensure accountability.

Canada must engage with our land claim organizations in an economic stimulus analysis that will form the foundation of long-term economic development planning. This way, Canada, territories, provinces, and Indigenous organizations can align our respective priorities and efficiently allocate our resources. This will ensure that we are able to maximize these major investments in infrastructure in a way that promotes local economic development and capacity-building in the near term. The current method of ad hoc funding can and will not achieve this long-term vision.

Any planning ensuing from this analysis will need to include a new land claim-specific approach to procurement in this region. This approach must be based in policy that takes a purposive view of the objectives of the IFA. The approach to the North Warning System contract, for example, would be guided by this policy.

### **A Note on Arctic Sovereignty**

The Western Arctic is located near three of the globe's most powerful states: China, Russia and the United States. The Western Arctic – including Inuvialuit Private Lands – holds vast natural resources that are crucial to energy-strapped populations. The Arctic is increasingly open to these foreign interests.

Infrastructure and active presence are vital factors in determining whether other states plan to knock on the front door or run right through it. We have all seen the investments that China has made in icebreaker technology. A few years ago, we were visited by three Russian amphibious vehicles who drove over the ice to Tuktoyaktuk, paid a land access fee and departed. There is not a single state waiting for Canada to get ready.

Arctic sovereignty requires more today than lofty statements in international venues and dictates from Ottawa. Our region is decades behind when it comes to certain key pieces of infrastructure, which causes such states to see this region as one that might be “taken” rather than “negotiated with”. Real sovereignty requires, in part, strategically placed infrastructure that invites industry on terms beneficial to Canada and Northerners and which sponsors sustainable growth and lasting security.

There has also been a recent drain of regional resources through a shift to remote monitoring and the centralisation of functions in southern bases. While in many areas this has seen an increase in efficiency and effectiveness through the grouping of skillsets, many of these centralized locations are so far away as to be unhelpful to the ISR. Also, more than monitoring and observing from remote locations to ensure sovereignty, presence and visibility demand respect.

### **Marine Infrastructure**

A functioning deep-water port is a key to supporting a variety of industries including natural resources and tourism. Currently, deep draft vessels cannot access the Western Arctic coast. This means that we cannot get Canadian minerals, fuels, or other goods off of our shores or welcome a tourism industry of any notable size into the region.

This also means that as competition increases between the Northern Sea Route, the Transpolar Sea Route and the Northwest Passage (NWP), shipping companies will look to the routes that have a more advantageous balance of efficiency and infrastructure. The ships that do transit

through the NWP will present all of the risks of grey water and ballast releases but leave none of the benefits of port fees and commerce.

A deep-water port in the community of Tuktoyaktuk would take advantage of the relatively sheltered coastline and confluence with the Mackenzie Delta to create a secure supply chain hub.

Relatedly, marine emergency response planning and infrastructure needs improvement in order to support national security, environmental integrity and tourism. These waters are still high risk for those seeking to pass through and for those of us who would bear the brunt of an accident or spill.

While the Canadian Coast Guard does seem committed to improving its presence in the region through the Marine Awareness Information System and better relationships with Inuit, it is far from acceptable in its current form. Trenton is two time zones and thousands of kilometers away from here. Under-resourced and often uncoordinated local volunteer units are still often considered a satisfactory approach to search and rescue.

The loss of local coast guard and military resources has also resulted in a further decline in local infrastructure. Even items such as community docks have been forgotten – crippling those who rely on this basic infrastructure daily.

### **Information infrastructure**

On December 22, 2016, the CRTC declared Internet a basic service. According to CRTC Chairman Blais, “The future of our economy, our prosperity and our society” require even our remote Arctic communities to be connected for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We need high speed Internet with built-in redundancy in our communities. This will make online education and e-health services available in our coastal communities. This has already found success in Ulukhaktok where 3 students graduated from high school by accessing online courses.

The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation has not been sitting on its hands waiting for this infrastructure to be developed. We have been working with the First Mile Connectivity Consortium and One Nation Networks to prepare and submit a to the federal Connect to Innovate Program for the development of Indigenous owned and operated Wireless Internet Service. Our plan would build on federal investments in the Mackenzie Valley Fiber Link and see high quality wireless internet reach Inuvik and Aklavik.

Internet is not only a social need in our region. Web access is also an essential piece of infrastructure that would support other major initiatives such as Marine Awareness Information Systems, energy development (every production site requires telecommunications for safety

and operations purposes), climate change monitoring, marine protected area monitoring and implementation, and tourism.

### **Energy Infrastructure**

We sit on more than a trillion cubic feet of natural gas at a time when our communities import fuel from thousands of kilometers to the south and at a time when other heavily populated countries need energy and are willing to go to great lengths to get it. This is a dynamic that is threatening the existence of our communities and the security of our coasts. The Arctic must not be for sale to companies that have not demonstrated the requisite level of commitment to the Canadian Arctic and a good corporate social responsibility track record.

The Western Arctic desperately needs a secure and affordable source of cleaner energy than the imported fuels we are still using in our communities today. Given our common objectives of mitigating the immediate impacts of climate change and releasing families from the crippling cost of imported energy, Canada needs to come to the table with us to plan a way out of this cycle of pollution and poverty. This cannot be achieved through small disconnected pots of funding. It needs to be done through partnership.

We are prepared to use our own funds to secure some of these assets in our region for the benefit of our communities. The return on investment will be relatively modest and not attractive to many in the private sector. But, we are willing to do this to help secure our future and support the implementation of our land claim agreement. As our partner, we need the federal government to prove its commitment to the environment, the Arctic and Indigenous peoples and help our communities convert from imported diesel to local natural gas.

### **Housing Infrastructure**

This government's investment in affordable housing in the arctic has been groundbreaking. Through the Housing Initiative funds, we have constructed 12 high-quality, energy efficient, sustainable and culturally relevant units using Indigenous-owned companies and local trades. We have already housed approximately 30 individuals, which has had an immediate impact on overcrowding in our communities. We have also been able to demolish 18 uninhabitable units, freeing up space for new builds.

This program is seeing incredible success. The only thing we would recommend changing is the pace of funding decisions and the nature of the funding vehicle. Year-by-year funding decisions do not allow us to get material where it needs to be for the construction season due to the barging schedules. A multi-year grant would allow us to order materials well in advance and in bulk to take advantage of lower per unit prices.

## **Local Military Infrastructure**

One of the essential elements of the state is the concrete and visible instrument of state power across the territory. Canada's riches are also at times its weakness from a geopolitical perspective. In this context, the Arctic is a vast territory with the most visible aspects of it being the sustained presences of our communities and our peoples over time.

A few years ago, the North Warning System contract was awarded to Raytheon Canada, which is subsidiary of an American company. There have been a number of serious problems in the management of those sites including fuel spills and failures to involve Inuit in a significant way. DND and PSPC acknowledged those deficiencies and acknowledged Canada's procurement obligations under our land claims agreements.

Our organizations have been engaging with DND and PSPC for the last year and a half to remedy this situation and ensure that Canada is maintaining a true presence on behalf of NORAD at these sites. Recently, however, PSPC has agreed to extend the contract with Raytheon for a three-year period instead of three successive one-year periods, which would allow Inuit and Canada to negotiate a long-term partnership for this work. This was surprising, highly disappointing and, in our view, risky for Canada.

A visible military infrastructure that is interwoven with the people that actually occupy the territory in any sustained way is necessary. Inuvialuit and our cousins to the east are ready to partner with Canada on this on a long-term basis.

## **Transportation Infrastructure**

The Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, officially opened in November 2017. The investments in this roadway have already opened up our region to further economic opportunity through tourism, research and access to resources. It has also improved the quality of life of many residents in Tuktoyaktuk and the Delta region that can now connect with their families more easily. This is an example of an anchor investment that will support long-term economic development for the region.

In contrast, earlier this month, the world heard how three coastal communities were left without a year's worth of essential supplies. This has required many of these items as fuel, skidoos required for hunting, staple foods, housing repair materials, formula and diapers to be airlifted or done without. Paulatuk required 700,000 litres of diesel to be airlifted into the community. Without this, they may not have lasted the winter.

This fall, the accessibility to Sachs Harbour was limited due to the poor quality of the airstrip, which has been degraded by impacts from the changing climate. Had Sachs Harbour been unreachable by barge this year, the consequences would have been catastrophic.

Investments have been made in our region over the last hundred years; but, as in southern Canada, they need to be refreshed and updated from time to time. A capital plan for airstrips and marine transport, which involves the federal and territorial government alongside Inuvialuit is sorely needed.

### **Food Infrastructure**

Until food, shelter and energy are secure, a community is not at liberty to focus on other areas of growth or expansion.

As the recent community supply disruption in Paulatuk, Cambridge Bay and Kugluktuk has made critically clear, our communities are not only energy insecure but also food insecure. Thousands of northern residents rely on precarious transportation infrastructure and once-per-year shipments of expensive food to survive the year.

IRC has been working through its research team and through the Inuvialuit Community Economic Development Organization to determine strategies for reducing reliance on imported food and repatriating control over sustenance through local food harvest and processing. We have a state-of-the-art mobile processing facility here in Inuvik where many Inuvialuit have been trained in processing and preservation of quality country food. These initiatives are worth Canada's ongoing support.

A resilient and robust Arctic-based population is in Canada's best interest.

If you have any questions on any of the points raised here, please feel free contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Duane Smith', written in a cursive style.

Duane Ningaqsiq Smith  
Chair and CEO