

Continued work on Arctic research imperative for North Slope

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(Editor's note - the following statement was presented by Robert Harcharek, director of Technical Assistance for the Village Corporation of Barrow, at a public hearing on the future of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory at Point Barrow. NARL is scheduled to be closed because of federal budget cuts)

Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corp. is the village corporation of Barrow, organized pursuant to Section 8 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Because the development of a comprehensive national Arctic research policy and the future utilization of the NARL facility will both directly impact upon the Inupiat people of Barrow, as well as the entire North Slope of Alaska, we deem it important that our views be communicated to Congress via the NARL Study Team.

Section 1007 of PL 96-287, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of Dec. 2, 1980 mandates a study of the mission, facilities and administration of the NARL. In its directive that recommendations be made "On the need for redirecting the United States Arctic research policy and the role of the NARL facilities in developing and implementing that policy," the legislation states in part that an assessment of the future use of NARL include:

"Developing relevant scientific information on the Arctic environment and utilizing applied research to . . . (B) minimize the impact of resource development on the environment and the culture of the Native people; and (C) promote international cooperation among the Nations which share responsibility for the Arctic Environment."

It also further mandates an assessment of . . .

"Developing a comprehensive Arctic policy for the Federal Government that will accommodate the need for development and use of Arctic resources with appropriate recognition and consideration given to the unique nature of the Arctic environment and the needs of its Native residents."

We feel that, from an overall perspective, the Study Team has prepared a comprehensive document which provides the basis for further analysis, discussion and commentary. We are in total agreement with the conclusion that the U.S. lacks a comprehensive or articulated Arctic research policy. We, therefore, strongly endorse the legislation introduced by Senators Frank Murkowski, Ted Stevens, and Henry Jackson, which emphasized that a comprehensive, coordinated well-defined policy of both basic and applied research is imperative to the national interest.

However, we feel that the report fails to address satisfactorily the specific man-

dated legislative language stated earlier. The accelerated development efforts in the Arctic, particularly those related to hydrocarbon resources, are impacting upon the indigenous people in ways for which there are few precedents in the history of mankind.

The consequences of thrusting modern civilization upon culturally distinct peoples, whose survival and existence itself have depended for centuries on the resources of land and sea are poorly understood by decision makers and scientists. The present state of scientific knowledge is deficient. Therefore, these consequences can not be predicted with any degree of confidence nor in a scientifically reliable fashion.

"If, by reason of the development of these resources, substantial adverse environmental consequences are suffered, it will not be the United States government, nor the oil companies, nor the people of the Lower 48 states who will bear the consequences of this action.

Rather, it will be the Inupiat people of the Arctic region who will bear the burden. Since the stakes involve the very cultural existence of the Eskimo, there is no room for error. Nor is there any such thing as a second chance."

It is most desirable for the indigenous Inupiat and other residents of the Arctic, as well as being imperative for the nation as a whole that federal, state and local governments, as well as private institutions and industry, do everything within their power and means to help mitigate the powerful forces of conflict and change resulting from hydrocarbon resource development, environmental conservation aims, and land reallocation on the preservation of the culturally complex society of the Inupiat.

It is of critical importance to determine and monitor the cumulative environmental and societal impacts of existing, bon resource development efforts in the Arctic, both nationally and internationally.

Today in the Arctic, we have an extension of the industrial complex with all of its advantages, problems and tensions. Exploitation of physical resources overcome most other considerations. In the Arctic major development decisions have already been made. National interests and goals will continue to dominate resource development decision making.

The lack of a general "Arctic policy" and only a casual attempt at coordination by the various federal agencies through the former Inter Agency Arctic Research Coordinating Committee and the Interagency Arctic Policy Group, has resulted in continuing and increasingly more complicated problems.

Conduct of scientific research in the Arctic has been and continues to be largely a collection of independent national efforts with a smattering of some international and local activity.

Truly joint international efforts to work on specific problems of the Arctic are quite limited. For all practical purposes, they do not exist nor have they been satisfactorily addressed in the Study Team's report. The Arctic basin is surrounded by countries, all of whom have their eyes on the Arctic. In its mandate to conduct the present study, Congress directed the assessment of the need to "promote international cooperation among the Nations which share responsibility for the Arctic environment."

For all practical purposes this mandate was only tokenly addressed in the present study. Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corp. strongly endorses this goal as directed by Congressional mandate. Furthermore, it strongly urges that any such cooperative efforts include the participation of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC).

The ICC is a confederation of Inuit peoples from the Arctic regions of Alaska, Canada and Greenland who have joined together in an effort to address and resolve common problems and concerns as residents of the Arctic. ICC involvement would ensure that the views and knowledge of the international Inuit community be included in Arctic research and development undertakings, and would enhance such research endeavors.

Development and implementation of an enlightened national Arctic research policy would improve the quality of

decision making at all levels. It is incumbent upon us to utilize every means available to point out, not only to the scientific world, but also to the policy and decision makers who provide the funds to support the majority of Arctic research that the scientific and societal payoffs are high enough to justify the costs associated with the maintenance and continued development of an Arctic Research Facility at Point Barrow.

The development and implementation of an explicit enlightened Arctic research policy needs not only to provide for policy guidance, program development, funding, and pro-

gram implementation, but also must include enforcement procedures and guidelines, possibly similar to those currently utilized by the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission.

Since the federal government is accelerating its interest in Arctic resources development, it is our contention that the Federal Government must also provide reasonable levels of protection for the Inupiat people whose lifestyle is being so seriously impacted. We agree with the North Slope Borough's assessment that it is the federal government's responsibility to provide for the establishment of

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an enlightened Arctic research policy which would also provide for the continued operation of the Arctic Research Laboratory.

The interest of the Inupiat people and other residents of the Arctic, is not to be taken lightly. We seek joint efforts, partnership and input into all levels of the decision-making process. Our concerns with the quality of life and the future of the Arctic are real, and we are going to be involved. We believe that the Arctic research facility should be utilized as a focal point for alternative energy resource development efforts as well as technological transfer, both of which will benefit the entire nation.

We contend that no existing federal agency be given the responsibility for control, operation, and development of an Arctic Research Laboratory. This is particularly true of NOAA, BLM, and the National Science Foundation who said that there is no need for an Arctic Research Lab, or fail to mention a need for a similar facility. In an era of federal budget cutting, it is essential that mechanisms be developed not only to merely allow, but also to encourage, funding from non-federal entities including private enterprise, local and state governments, as well as the petrochemical industry.

We endorse the recommendations and commentaries presented by the North Slope Borough concerning this draft report, and would like to emphasize the recommendations that a non-profit corporation be established to administer and manage the Arctic Research Laboratory.

At a number of points in the study, the authors comment that "the only justification for possibly continuing the facility is to provide logistics support to visiting scientists in the execution of Arctic research projects."

We suggest that mechanisms be firmly established for the

increased involvement of the Inupiat people at all levels of the decision-making process regarding an Arctic Research Lab, and participation in the subsequent operation and utilization of that facility. This would include, but not be limited to, utilization of the facilities for conferences, lectures, and vocational education. It could also be used effectively and efficiently as a campus for a locally controlled post-secondary educational institution.

The prospectus for an enlightened Arctic research policy, which includes the maintenance, operation, and further development of an Arctic Research Laboratory facility is clouded by the potential impact of events outside the normal venue of the scientific communities. Only by a concerted effort and cooperative involvement in the decision-making process, will the voices of the scientists and the Inupiat be heard.

The decisions to be made concerning resource development, NARL and an Arctic research policy will, by necessity, be both political and economic, but the Inupiat population and the scientific community must be involved if development is going to be channelled and focused, thereby lessening the detrimental societal effects associated with accelerated resource development.

If by chance the decision is made to close the NARL facility, it is our opinion that the facility be surplused and transferred to the village corporation or the North Slope Borough, to be utilized as an education and scientific center to possibly include a campus for a locally controlled postsecondary institution, a conference center, and a base for locally sponsored basic and applied research. The precedent for such transfer of facilities and lands has already been established through enactment and subsequent enforcement of the D-2 legislation.

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