



**Geoffrey F. Bruce Fellowship  
in Canadian Freshwater Policy**

## **Inuit Indigenous Knowledge and Freshwater Governance in Inuit communities**

### **POLICY BRIEF**

by  
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Bruce Fellow 2018

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## **Introduction**

Nearly 21% of Canada's freshwater, almost 1/5<sup>th</sup> is based in Nunavut (INAC 2017). Water is central to communities and the livelihoods of all Inuit people. Inuit peoples were stewards of the land and water for hundreds of years, living by policies informed by Indigenous laws, culture and practices. Until the 1950s in the pre-settlement era, freshwater was governed by Inuit peoples using Inuit Qaujimaqtuqanit (Inuit Indigenous Knowledge) that were integrated into everyday practices.

As Inuit peoples settled into communities, some not by choice, use and governance of freshwater changed. Historically, Inuit peoples and communities used raw source waters from surface waters and glaciers. Increasingly people have become users of treated water (Daley et.al. 2015) and wastewater remains a significant challenge. While Nunavut has a small population of 65,000 people spread across 51 communities (ITK 2018), water uses have changed significantly which has implications public health, community development, wellness and subsistence (Daley et al., 2015: 130).

Today freshwater sources in Nunavut face an increase in climate vulnerability, major infrastructure challenges and growing demands on freshwater. Freshwater in Nunavut's arctic climate is vulnerable to climate change resulting in unknown hydrological behaviours that effects, not only humans but plants and animals as well. Changes in freshwater water quality and availability have both ecosystem and human health consequences and have also been connected to food insecurity for the majority of Inuit who rely on harvesting their food (ITK 2018).

## **The Policy & Governance Problem**

The changes in water have accelerated since Nunavut became a territory in 1999. This has resulted in a number of northern strategies related to natural resources. In the past two decades, the federal government has been trying to consolidate northern strategies and policies under a singular policy framework, the Arctic Policy Framework. Increasingly, policy approaches from Ottawa have encroached into water governance areas that the Inuit peoples self-governed for hundreds of years using IQ. In 2016, the federal government initiated public consultation on the Arctic Policy Framework focused on infrastructure, communities, economies, science, Indigenous knowledge, environmental protection and conservation (Canada CIRNAC 2018). The policy framework is aimed at developing a long-term policy framework in collaboration with Indigenous, territorial and provincial partners to replace Canada's Northern Strategy (2009) and set out a vision for governance to 2030.



Although the process had a broad-based engagement process in 2018, Nunavut has faced some serious challenges in this process and in trying to maintain IQ approaches to water governance and policy. Inuit involvement in setting a freshwater agenda that is on par with the other territories is not a simple undertaking given Nunavut's geography and existing deficits in social, economic and environmental policies. Of the \$566M spending on infrastructure over the next 10 years, \$207M is allocated to greener energy and water.<sup>2</sup> However, with 25 independent water treatment, wastewater, and generation systems, Nunavut's strategy and planning for freshwater has to balance several community needs. Creating and implementing community freshwater strategies using inclusive governance processes and IQ principles must be understood in the context of Nunavut's self-government arrangements, land claim organizations, and Inuit organizations.

### **Contributing Policy Factors**

With a high population growth rate of Inuit peoples in Nunavut and overcrowded housing, the demands on freshwater are increasing. Although Inuit peoples consume the least amount of water per capita, at about 100/L per person per day compared to 300/L per person per day elsewhere in Canada (Daley, Castleden, Jamieson, Furgal, & Ell, 2015), water sources are stressed. Water is still sourced from local streams and the cultural practice of retrieving water and ice remains an important factor included in the Nunavut freshwater agenda. Public health and subsistence protection inform the backbone to this research into Inuit environmental stewardship or IQ principle *Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq*. One of the main policy factors that requires research and understanding by policy makers and decision makers, both within the communities, and by policy makers in Ottawa are the cultural foundations of water policy and governance.

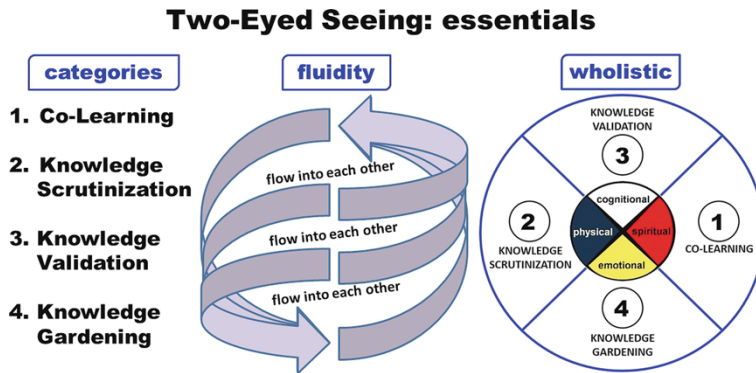
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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/new-infrastructure-money-nunavut-1.4597610>



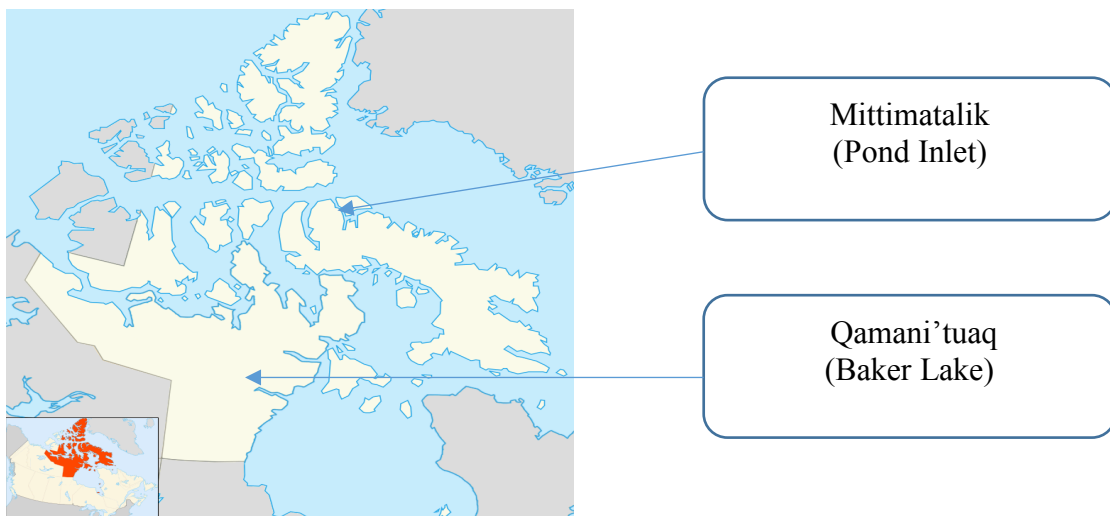
## Two-Eyed Seeing Policy and Governance Research

The research project explores, documents and analyzes the IQ foundations of water governance and policy in Nunavut using a two-eyed seeing approach



Source: adapted from Bartlett, Marshall and Marshall, 2012.

Based on in-depth research in two communities: Pond Inlet and Baker Lake, this project seeks to understand freshwater governance and policy in Nunavut from the perspective of Inuit peoples, elders, water users, managers, decision makers, and policy implementers. Using Indigenous methodologies that include field research, ethnography, focus groups, 'table conversations', 'table teachings' and narrative policy analysis, this research focuses on understanding the traditional knowledge and principles that underpin water governance in Nunavut water policy. Using Indigenous methodologies also calls for understanding and sharing the IQ foundations of water governance and policy in Nunavut, in Canada's North, and beyond.





## Preliminary Research Foundations

### Freshwater and Wastewater Governance in Nunavut: Sharing Inter-generational Knowledge in Policy and Governance

Western/Southern Ways of Knowing

- Reports
- Newspapers
- Job responsibilities and roles
- Measurements and studies
- Mapping

Inuit Ways of Knowing

- Observations
- Stories
- Experiences
- Living histories
- Memories

How does a two-eyed seeing comparative approach help us better understand water governance challenges in Nunavut?

What are the policy beliefs and narratives related to freshwater and wastewater in Nunavut communities?

What are the Indigenous and non-Indigenous policy beliefs and narratives related to freshwater and wastewater in Nunavut?

What are the implications for water governance and policy?

Are the freshwater and wastewater policy challenges experienced differently or shared across Nunavut communities?

What intergenerational Inuit knowledge is evident in policy narratives related to freshwater and wastewater?

How can it be sustained or advanced?

<p><b>Watershed:</b> Land areas that channel rainwater and snowmelt into streams and rivers that flow out to reservoirs, bays and the ocean</p> <p><b>Freshwater:</b> Water suitable for consumption, water that is not salty</p> <p><b>Wastewater:</b> Water affected by human use</p>	<p><b>Policy narrative:</b> The content (structure) and form (context) of a policy-related issue, includes documents, dialogue and processes</p> <p><b>Policy Belief:</b> Attitudes towards policy issues, often arranged as priorities</p> <p><b>Intergenerational knowledge:</b> Knowledge shared between younger and older people, spanning several generations</p>
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This research...

- Examines water policy processes for community building and intergenerational connection in Mitiitaitalik & Qamani'tuq communities
- Explores Nunavut-specific forms and content of policy issues on freshwater and wastewater
- Explores how different types of watersheds (large and small) are experienced and governed

## Policy Research to Date

To date, the Bruce Fellowship funding has supported my attendance and co-presentation at the Arctic Frontiers conference presentation in Trømsø, Norway in 2018. The presentation focused on *Piliriqatigiingniq in Practice: a look at common governance principles in Inuit Land Claims Organizations between 2006-2016*. This conference paper/presentation is currently being revised for publication as a book chapter.

The support of the Bruce scholarship in 2018 provided funding to conduct the foundational research for my dissertation. The funding support provided an opportunity for me to focus on the freshwater governance policy and scholarly literature and prepare for the field research components of my dissertation. A portion of the Bruce Fellowship funding is also being used to fund travel to the North and Nunavut to build relationships with community members and the water policy actors in Pond Inlet and Baker Lake. Indigenous research methodologies call for community-based approaches and relationship building. The Bruce Fellowship funding has supported some of this important relationship building.



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