

**Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA)
International Scientific Symposium on
Climate Change in the Arctic
Reykjavik, Iceland
November 9-12, 2004**

Traveler

Bobbie Jo Greenland -Youth representative for Gwich'in Council International (GCI)

Funding

GCI and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)

Purpose of trip

The purpose of the trip was for me to represent Gwich'in Council International (GCI) at the Symposium and to provide a report back to the GCI and communities. As I am quite new to the GCI, this trip also served as an introduction for me to the Arctic Council. Attending this symposium was a good opportunity for me to meet people in the Arctic Council Working Groups, including permanent participants. I learned a lot and now have a better understanding of the Arctic Council and about the ACIA.

Background Information

The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment is a project implemented by Arctic Monitoring Assessment Programme (AMAP), Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) and the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC).

The Arctic Council is high-level non-governmental forum that serves to address the concerns and issues that people and Government in the Arctic are facing. The Eight Arctic Nations make up the Arctic Council. These being; Canada, United States, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark/Greenland. There are also 6 Indigenous peoples organizations that are permanent participants of the Arctic Council. These Indigenous groups are; Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Russian Association of Indigenous People of the North, and Saami Council. The official observers include; France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom, non-governmental organizations, and scientific and other international bodies.

The Arctic is very important to the world for a number of reasons and it is has been and continues to experience rapid changes. Climate Change in the Arctic is a serious issue and it is important for decision makers and policy makers to have access to the latest and most accurate information available to them regarding these changes in the Arctic. These are the reasons why the Arctic Council called for the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA). The ACIA involved international efforts by hundreds of scientists as well as Indigenous people of the Arctic.

The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, International Scientific Symposium was held in Reykjavik, Iceland, November 9-12, 2004. It was a gathering of the Arctic Council members, participants and observers. The Symposium was a 4-day event of presentations, sessions and mini panels covering the 10 Key Findings, studies and results with in the ACIA. In addition to ACIA, AMAP report 2004, there was a plain language synthesis of the key findings of ACIA released as well at the Symposium. This plain language version is titled Impacts of a Warming Climate, ACIA. According to this plain language version, the ten key findings of the ACIA are as follows.

Ten Key Findings

1. Arctic Climate is now warming rapidly and much larger changes are projected.
2. Arctic Warming and its consequences have worldwide implications.
3. Arctic Vegetation Zones are very likely to shift, causing wide-ranging impacts.
4. Animal species diversity, ranges, and distribution will change.
5. Many coastal communities and facilities face increasing exposure to storms.
6. Reduced sea ice is very likely to increase marine transport and access to resources.
7. Thawing ground will disrupt transportation, buildings and other infrastructure.
8. Indigenous communities are facing major economic and cultural impacts.
9. Elevated ultraviolet radiation levels will affect people, plants and animals.
10. Multiple influences interact to cause impacts to people and ecosystems.

(Hassol, Susan Joy (2004). Impacts of a Warming Climate. ACIA, Cambridge University Press)

Personal Thoughts and Comments

I learned more about the Arctic Council and the participation of the Gwich'in Council International (GCI). I think that the GCI is a valuable organization and with continued support, is capable of doing a lot of good work..

There were many presentations at the ACIA symposium and as participants, we were required to choose which sessions we attended. The first day of the symposium was one session where everyone gathered together to hear welcoming and opening statements.

Day 1 was also the official release of documents and presentations of the main results and the conclusions and recommendations from the ACIA.

On Day 2 I chose to sit in:

Sessions 2 – Past, present and future changes in biological systems

Session 4- Impacts on Wildlife and Conservation/Policy Issues.

Mini-panel-Achieving Environmental Protection in the Arctic: Is there common ground?

On Day 3 I chose to sit in:

Session 6- Impacts on Human Activities

Session 8- Past, Present and Future changes in Social Systems

Mini-panel- Indigenous Perspectives on Climate Change in Social Systems. Elaine Alexie from Fort McPherson was also at the symposium and she was there to be a part of this mini- panel on Indigenous Perspectives. She did a great job as she spoke about the importance of the environment to the Gwich'in and about the concerns we have about Climate Change and the impacts it will have on our traditional knowledge and way of life. Also on the panel with Elaine was Pavel Sulyandziga from Russia representing the Russian Association of Indigenous People of the North (RAIPON).

On Day 4 it was back to one large session for everyone. This session was the science panel- looking to the future and then the stakeholder panel- looking to the future. These sessions were followed by a summary of the meeting results and then a Post-Symposium press conference.

I think that the Symposium overall was very good. The organizers did a great job and I learned a lot. I also met many people, which is good for me as a fairly new member to the Gwich'in Council International (GCI). It was a good opportunity for introduction and establishing contact for future working relations and communication.

I did have one concern though and that was in regards to the presentations on Indigenous peoples and perspectives. There were a few presentations listed on the programme that were later cancelled because the presenters could not make it to the symposium. These were presentations on Indigenous perspectives by Indigenous people and I just found it disappointing that for whatever reasons, they had to cancel. I think that such opportunities should be taken to full advantage as it is so important for Indigenous peoples to make these type of presentations. I think people listen more attentively when it is the Indigenous people themselves talking about their perspectives. It makes it all that much more real when it comes from someone with the first hand knowledge and personal experiences to what they are presenting.

I would like to thank the GCI board members for their support and encouragement to participate in the GCI and attend the ACIA symposium in Iceland. I would also like to thank GCI's Coordinator Ethel Blake for her time and work in coordinating travel and other necessary arrangements on my behalf.

Next Steps

There is to be a 4th Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik Iceland on November 24, 2004. The project leader of ACIA will be presenting the science results at this meeting. The Chair of the Arctic Council will also be presenting policy conclusions of the ACIA at this meeting.

The Senior Arctic Official's (SAO) will also be meeting in Reykjavik on November 22 and 23, 2004, just prior to the Ministerial meeting. Updates on Arctic Council Working

groups, Financing of projects and permanent participation are among some of the issues that will be discussed at the SAO meeting.

Some web sites to check out

Northern Indigenous Views on Climate Change and Ecology

www.snowchange.org

ACIA Symposium website

www.amap.no/acia

Arctic Council

www.arctic-council.org

Arctic Athabaskan Council

www.arcticathabaskancouncil.com

Gwich'in Council International

www.gwichin.org