

Title: Elevating Indigenous Knowledge to guide the equitable engagement of Indigenous perspectives in co-management and recovery planning of ice seals

"I have learned a lot in the past, working with federal agencies [trying to] work better. It is something that is in our sights, but we still have a long way to go. It will [be better] when we have more people at the table... Many decision-makers don't know our lifestyle, don't know what it is like to live in communities, to be Iñupiat. We have a lot to learn from each other. It would be beneficial to have local experts to share about our traditional & cultural foods and issues, using our observations..."

- Billy Adams, (Utqiagvik AOKH Iñupiaq observer & Ice Seal Committee Chairman)

Researchers: Donna Hauser (UAF), Roberta Tuurraq Glenn-Borade (UAF), Alaska Arctic Observatory & Knowledge Hub (AAOKH)

Collaborators: Ice Seal Committee, NOAA Fisheries, NOAA Alaska Regional Office

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Summary: Our goal is to support the knowledge and views of Alaska Native communities and ice seal hunters. We'll work with the Ice Seal Committee (ISC) and Alaska Arctic Observatory & Knowledge Hub (AAOKH) to understand Indigenous observations of ringed and bearded seals. By using existing ISC and AAOKH reports, we aim to guide NOAA Fisheries in recovery planning and working equitably with the ISC and hunters to understand ice seals.

Timeline: New project, anticipated to start March 1, 2025, for up to 3 years. *Year 1* (starting March 1, 2025) will focus on summarizing existing AAOKH and ISC observations and reports of ice seals, to describe and document Indigenous Knowledge and perspectives on various



"Very clear and calm, temperature was about 10f, and light east winds. The current was going south 1mph or slower. There was scattered pack ice about a half mile out that looked to be sturdy... Very peaceful on the ice.... **Fat seals equals fat bears.**" -Billy Adams, Utqiagvik observation & photos, 4 Dec. 2023

aspects of ringed and bearded seal ecology, such as health status, body condition, diet, disease, habitat use, migration timing, and relative abundance. AAOKH will additionally support observers to join and contribute to Ice Committee Meetings. Assuming continued funding from NOAA, *Year 2* (2026) will involve a series of in-person workshops within ISC regional hub communities (Utqiagvik, Kotzebue, Nome,

Bethel, and Dillingham) to share updates, listen to feedback, and revise and respond – all to support guidance to NOAA Fisheries on ice seal co-management as well as recovery planning. *Year 3* (2027) will focus on co-developing reports, publications, and sharing results.

Request: We respectfully request from the ISC to please: 1) indicate how you define healthy seals, to guide our summaries, and 2) provide access to ISC annual reports and meeting minutes so we can summarize your observations.

AAOKH data use agreement: Coastal observers of Arctic Alaska. 2022. Local Observations from the Seasonal Ice Zone Observing Network (SIZONet) and Alaska Arctic Observatory and Knowledge Hub (AAOKH), Version 2. Edited by the AAOKH Team. Boulder, CO: National Snow & Ice Data Center. <https://doi.org/10.7265/jhws-b380>.