Thank you very much to the organizers of this session for inviting me to join this panel to offer an overview of the impact assessment approaches employed in Nunavut.

This picture was taken in April from the community of Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, where I am very fortunate to live and work. Though Nunavut is a part of Canada, I think this helps to illustrate that we are somewhat far removed from centers like Montreal and enjoy slightly different operating conditions as a result.
As you are no doubt aware, Canada has a number of settled and unsettled land claims agreements with its indigenous peoples, particularly in the northern reaches of the country. The territory of Nunavut came into being in 1996 and is unique for being covered by one comprehensive land claims agreement negotiated for by the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area.
Nunavut is unique within the landscape of Canada, and this has direct effects on our regulatory system. It’s a vast geography, over 2 million square kilometers of total area, spanning 3 time zones and consisting of arctic and sub-arctic environments. We have less than 0.1% of the Canadian population spread out over 25 communities occupying approximately one-fifth of Canada’s land mass.

There are no roads connecting any of Nunavut’s communities to one another or to the rest of Canada; the cost of living is extremely high.
Nunavut’s population is predominately of Inuit descent, persons who enjoy a strong, vibrant culture that is still very closely linked with seasonal cycles of wildlife harvesting and local dialects of Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun.
Through the Nunavut Agreement, Inuit received defined rights and benefits in exchange for surrender of any claims, rights, title and interests based on their assertion of an aboriginal title.
The Nunavut Agreement established an integrated resource management system for the whole of the Nunavut Settlement Area, a vast area of land and marine waters rich in both natural resources (such as minerals, oil and gas) and renewable resources (such as fish and wildlife).

Importantly, the Nunavut Agreement established a requirement for the formation of a public government for Nunavut and 5 independent institutions of public government with a role in land and resource management. These institutions were structured in a co-management fashion with representation from the Designated Inuit Organization, the Government of Nunavut and the Government of Canada.
Focusing on the regulatory system applicable to resource development projects, we have separate institutions that are responsible for land use planning, environmental impact assessment, and water licensing. The integrated nature of the system requires varying levels of coordination amongst these Boards, which is ensured through specific legislative provisions and more practically through the regular communication required to carry out our respective duties.
Through this regulatory regime the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) has been conducting environmental impact assessments since 1996. The NIRB screens project proposals to determine whether or not a full review is required, gauging and defining the extent of regional impacts by reviewing the potential biophysical, social and economic effects of project proposals.

The Board determines whether projects should proceed, and if so, under what terms and conditions, providing these recommendations to Government Ministers responsible for final decision-making. The NIRB also has a role in monitoring projects that have been screened or reviewed and approved to proceed.
We assess all types of proposed development projects, from infrastructure projects like roads and ports, to mineral exploration and mining projects, hydro developments, etc.
While the Board’s processes are comparable to other Canadian jurisdictions, there is an especially strong focus on promoting and enabling public engagement throughout. This is reflective of the objectives of the Nunavut Agreement, which ensured rights for Inuit to participate in decision-making concerning the use, management and conservation of land, water and resources in the Nunavut Settlement Area.
All information related to an assessment can be accessed online from our website and public registry system. These have been designed to allow any member of the public to easily search for assessments of interest and to provide comments or questions through a simple online form in their language of choice: English, French, Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun.

Despite low internet speeds and bandwidth limitations in Nunavut, we continue to explore ways to increase public access to assessments through the internet and other available technologies. In fact, just last night a new version of our website was launched online to improve load times and host additional interactive features.
In addition to making information accessible online, we regularly visit communities that could be affected by a proposed development, sharing information and soliciting feedback.

Engagement is designed to be iterative throughout an assessment, requiring multiple visits to allow for familiarization with project plans and to create meaningful opportunities for information to be exchanged both ways.
We strive to ensure that engagement leads to tangible results. For example, during issues scoping, feedback provided by the public is directly linked to the establishment of information requirements that must be satisfied through the assessment.
An important component of the feedback received is often local community knowledge or Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, which is a critical component of our processes. It plays a significant role in the preparation and evaluation of Environmental Impact Statements in terms of establishing baseline information, identifying key issues, predicting effects and assessing their significance.

Proper recognition of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit allows for creation of an Inuit lens through which impact analyses can be better understood and can contribute to more active and meaningful community engagement.

While much has been made of instances where traditional knowledge and science-based knowledge do not align, in the Nunavut-context Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit contributes greatly to assessments, more often than not helping to reinforce areas where the available science is lacking.
During the final phase of an assessment, a public hearing will be scheduled in the community nearest to the proposed development. The proponent, technical experts, government regulators and intervenors attend in person to present their final submissions and answer the questions of the Board.

A community roundtable is held as part of this hearing process, with community representatives from throughout the region attending to present their community’s concerns about the development directly to our Board. Community members have opportunity to pose questions directly to the project proponent, government experts and other intervenors.
In summary, for this short overview the takeaway points I hoped to highlight include:

- The Nunavut process is very holistic in nature, designed to assess large and small projects, to monitor the effects of projects and incorporate lessons learned into ongoing assessments.
- Our public outreach programs are structured to facilitate active engagement throughout our processes, through a variety of means.
- Local community knowledge and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is actively solicited and considered, and plays a key role in designing adaptive management approaches.
- And overall, our approaches for impact assessment are continually evolving.

Summary

- Monitoring programs allow for feedback of lessons learned into ongoing assessments.
- Public outreach structured to facilitate active engagement throughout processes.
- Local community knowledge and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is actively solicited and considered.
- Approaches are continually evolving.
Quajannamiik!
Thank you!
Merci!

Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB)
P.O. Box 1360
Cambridge Bay, NU
Toll Free: 1-866-233-3033
Fax: 1-867-983-2594
www.nirb.ca