

# A Conservation Area Led by Inuit, for Inuit

The SINAA PFP Agreement was signed on February 27, 2025, by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), the Government of Canada, the Aajuraq Conservation Fund Society, and The Pew Charitable Trusts, on behalf of private donors and Enduring Earth. In the Inuit language of Inuktitut, SINAA means the floe edge - where the land and ice meets the open water. This name was selected by Qikiqtani Inuit as it describes the important and historical interaction Inuit have between their lands and waters.

Following the funding allocation of CAD \$200 million from the Government of Canada for SINAA, which will further unlock CAD \$70 million in donor private donor funding, an official closing ceremony and launch of SINAA was hosted by QIA in Iqaluit, Nunavut in November 2025. QIA was joined by Canada's Secretary of State for Nature, donors, partners, Inuit community members, and representatives from the Nauttiqsuqtiit (Inuit guardians) program. SINAA is one of the world's largest Indigenous-led marine conservation and community development initiatives, and the tenth PFP globally.

The Qikiqtani region of Nunavut spans roughly 10% of Canada's lands and seas and includes more than 1,500 islands and a network of polynyas - open water areas surrounded by sea ice. With nearly 90% of its waters recognized as biologically significant, it is one of the most biodiverse regions in the Arctic. Its rich coastal and marine ecosystems provide critical habitat for iconic species, including beluga, bowhead whale, migratory birds, and ringed seal - all of which support the culture, economy, and health of Qikiqtani Inuit. The region is also home to caribou, the world's largest subpopulation of polar bears, and the vast majority of the planet's narwhals.

The SINAA initiative is designed to support Qikiqtani Inuit led stewardship and governance of its 1,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Arctic waters and critical habitat and is grounded in Inuit governance principles (Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit). Over the estimated 10-year PFP transition period, the PFP aims to establish permanent conservation for 12.26% of Canada's oceans, which represents a substantial commitment to protecting 30% of Canada's marine environment by 2030. The SINAA Conservation Plan, which was developed by QIA in consultation with the 13 Qikiqtani Inuit communities, outlines clear milestones for new marine conservation and improved conservation of existing marine areas.

The expansion of Inuit conservation leadership through Nauttiqsuqtiit (Inuit stewards) programs in Qikiqtani communities will be supported through SINAA. Inuit stewards in the Nauttiqsuqtiit program actively monitor marine resources and harvest food for the well-being of their communities. SINAA will support close to 100 positions for new Nauttiqsuqtiit staff, and will provide infrastructure, equipment, and training for Inuit-led research, environmental monitoring, and community support activities. The SINAA agreement will also support Qikiqtani Inuit-led governance, empowering communities to implement conservation efforts that incorporate local and regional perspectives.

“Our people have been conservationists living here in our area for thousands of years. Inuit knowledge is part of the SINAA agreement, and our people understand how important it is for us to have a conservation area led by Inuit, for Inuit. SINAA will increase protection of our ocean and land and will create employment opportunities.”

**Olayuk Akesuk, the President of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association**



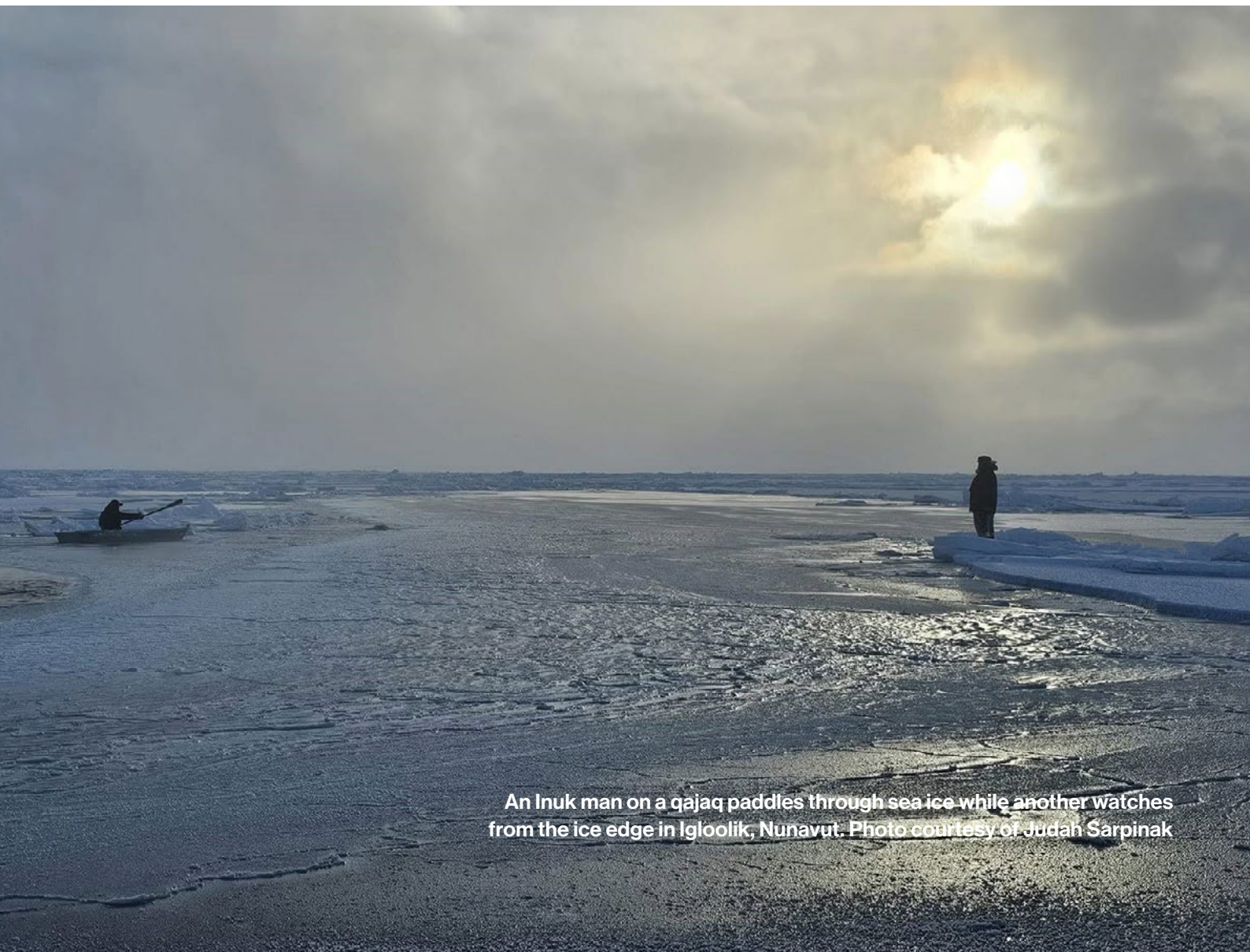
Four Qikiqtani elders review a map and discuss areas in need of protection in the Qikiqtani region in the spring of 2024 during a meeting in Iqaluit, Nunavut.  
© Gloria Uluqsi / Qikiqtani Inuit Association

SINAA's clear and ambitious vision catalyzed the support of philanthropic funders, who together pledged CAD \$70 million. Funding partners include Pew, Bezos Earth Fund, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, ZOMA LAB, the Sitka Foundation, the Echo Foundation, Becht Foundation, Vere Initiatives, and the McLean Foundation.

The SINAA initiative required the creation of a new conservation trust fund, the Aajuraq Conservation Fund Society, which was registered in December 2024. Aajuraq held its first Board meeting in July 2025 in Iqaluit and began the important work of operationalizing the CTF. Pew is providing the support of an organizational development consultant to assist SINAA's Board with initial formation and policy development. The board has hired a Canadian consulting firm to function as the interim Secretariat while it develops and adopts key operational policies and begins the search for a CEO.

In December 2025, several of the Aajuraq Board members participated in a Pew-hosted Investment Management Workshop in Edmonton, Alberta to build understanding of investment management best practices. With participation from trust fund directors from Our Land for the Future and Coast Funds, the Aajuraq Board members also had the opportunity to share lessons learned and hear from other PFP leaders in Canada.

The SINAA PFP resulted in many valuable lessons, from how to engage 13 very remote communities in conservation planning to how to advance a complex PFP with multiple simultaneous negotiations. Three lessons are highlighted here. First, a year before closing, QIA, the Government of Canada and Pew signed an Agreement in Principle, which included 46 closing conditions and outlined clearly and early the targeted outcomes. The AIP guided the PFP negotiations. Second, since SINAA required the creation of a new conservation trust fund, which takes time and requires expertise, it was key to build the fund creation into the overall PFP planning period. Third, recognizing the scale of the initiative, QIA built into its implementation plan the time needed to revamp its staffing to effectively implement the PFP, which is why funding was not planned for disbursement in year one.



An Inuk man on a qajaq paddles through sea ice while another watches from the ice edge in Igloodik, Nunavut. Photo courtesy of Judah Sarpinak



Arctic sunset near Pond Inlet, Canada © Exclusive Aerials/Adobe