

ICENAV - Community Involvement and consultation

A. Cambridge Bay

Qillaq Innovations and DRDC collaborate since 2025 towards the development of a capability to deploy all-weather, long-range drones for ice mapping and Search and Rescue (SAR) missions, along with developing the supporting infrastructure for on-demand operational aerial support within 600 km of Cambridge Bay (CB).

Qillaq Innovations (Qillaq) is a 100% Inuit-owned company based in the heart of Cambridge Bay. At Qillaq, our mission is to offer quality professional services in property management, construction, automotive maintenance and heavy equipment operations to meet the needs of Nunavummiut in the Kitikmeot region. Qillaq owns a 890 m² hangar on the edge of Cambridge Bay airport, with direct access to the runway. In addition to the hangar, Qillaq operates a 600 m² office & shop facility adjacent to the airport terminal and are constructing a new 900 m² office/warehouse.

The technical collaboration between DRDC and Qillaq Innovation has the following primary objectives:

1. To integrate Indigenous Arctic knowledge, experience, and personnel
2. To provide regular aerial drone flights, including ice-survey missions and SAR operations, within a 600 km radius of Cambridge Bay.
3. To establish a core team of Nunavut community specialists trained in the planning, operation, and maintenance of these drones.
4. To build the supporting infrastructure, logistics, and procedures necessary to sustain and expand this capability in future years.

Qillaq Innovations has been funded by DRDC under the IDEAS program with a \$1,000,000 grant to encourage the creation of an Arctic Operation center for Autonomous Platforms in Cambridge Bay

There are direct benefits to the local community in Cambridge Bay. This project will engage Inuit communities, where youth unemployment is high, in meaningful, skilled employment opportunities. Local facilities will be utilized as the command center, and operations and maintenance workshops will be established. Logistics will be sourced through Inuit-owned companies, ensuring that the local economy benefits from long-term employment and flow-down contracts. Additionally, external contractors working on-site will contribute to the local economy by staying in the community, amplifying the project's economic impact. By providing the necessary training and workforce development to operate autonomous systems, the project will help build a highly skilled local workforce ready to contribute to Canada's northern security. Moreover, the introduction of new sea-ice surveillance and Search and Rescue capabilities in Cambridge Bay will directly benefit local communities, particularly for those who live, work, and hunt in the surrounding areas, enhancing both safety and operational capacity.

Furthermore, the ICENAV team has also contacted Mr. Jim MacEachern, Senior Administrative Officer Municipality of Cambridge Bay as well as Mr. Peter Evalik and Ms. Beverly Maksagak from Ekaluktutiak Hunters and Trappers Organization.

We are currently waiting for a response from them., as an initial outreach effort, an informational poster describing the ICENAV project is currently being prepared for public display at the Canadian High Arctic Research Station (CHARS) in Cambridge Bay.

B. Resolute Bay

The ICENAV team has also contacted Mr. Ian Dudla, Senior Administrative Officer, Municipality of Resolute Bay as well as Mr. Mark Amarualik and Ms. Nancy Amarualik from Resolute Bay Hunters and Trappers Organization.

We have signaled to the community that there is still some flexibility regarding route planning of the ICENAV mission. We have invited the community members or the HTO to address questions, concerns, and observations to ICENAV's Scientific team as well as local knowledge that they may wish to share. We let them know that such input could help identify opportunities to adjust activities or routing in a manner that better respects local priorities and ongoing land use. We have also offered to provide additional information or arrange a discussion with members of the scientific team. We are currently waiting for a response from them.

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