



NIRB File No.: 18YN029

Related to NIRB File No.: 17YN016

NPC File No.: 149083

Related to NPC File No.: 148421, 148442, 148813

DFO File No.: S-18/19-1009-NU

Previous NRI File NO.: 02 064 18N-A

April 23, 2019

Christopher Knowlton
University of Rhode Island
218 South Ferry Road
Narragansett, RI 02879 USA

Sent via email: cknowlton@uri.edu

Re: Notice of Screening for University of Rhode Island's "URI Northwest Passage Project 2019" Project Proposal

Dear Christopher Knowlton:

On March 25, 2019 the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB or Board) received a referral to screen the University of Rhode Island's (URI) "URI Northwest Passage Project 2019" project proposal from the Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC or Commission), with an accompanying positive conformity determination with the North Baffin Regional Land Use Plan. The NPC noted that the previous conformity determination issued on January 27, 2017, February 10, 2017, and April 24, 2018 for the activities associated with the current proposal continues to apply and has determined that the project proposal is a significant modification to the project because of the additions of new locations around Austin Channel, Viscount Melville Sound (near Resolute Bay) and Lady Ann Strait (near Grise Fiord).

Pursuant to Article 12, Sections 12.4.1 and 12.4.4 of the *Agreement between the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada (Nunavut Agreement)* and section 87 of the *Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act*, S.C. 2013, c. 14, s. 2 (*NuPPAA*), the NIRB has commenced screening this project proposal. Due to the proposal containing activities that are sufficiently related to previously assessed activities under NIRB file number **18YN029**, the NIRB views this project proposal as an amendment to the previously screened project and has assigned this proposal with this previous file number. Please reference this file number in all future related correspondence. A summary of the previously screened project activities can be found in **Appendix A**.

INFORMATION REQUEST

On March 25, 2019 the NIRB requested that the Proponent complete the online application form through the NIRB's public registry system and ensure, pursuant to s. 144(1) of the *NuPPAA*, that the information provided be sufficient to determine the scope of the project activities being proposed and that sufficient information has been provided to commence screening. Following a preliminary completeness check of the proposal as submitted, the NIRB determined that the proposal did not contain the necessary information for the NIRB to carry out its screening and on April 9, 2019 requested that the Proponent provide the Board with the additional information in order to carry out the screening of the project proposal.

On April 12, 2019 the NIRB received the required additional information and commenced the screening pursuant to Part 3 of the *NuPPAA*.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Scope:

The "URI Northwest Passage Project 2018" project activities as previously screened by the NIRB (File No. 18YN029) included a scientific expedition aboard a research vessel transiting the Northwest Passage, and encompassed research sites from Resolute Bay to Cambridge Bay via Bellot Strait, including Lancaster Sound, Pond Inlet and Iqaluit. The Proponent's study focused on the impact of the secular warming trends over the Arctic Circle on the waters of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago (CAA). A complete description of the scope of activities previously approved has been included within **Appendix A**.

URI is currently proposing the "URI Northwest Passage Project 2019" project which would be located within the Qikiqtani (North Baffin) and Kitikmeot regions and encompasses multiple research sites from Pond Inlet to Resolute Bay via Bellot Strait, including Lancaster Sound, Wellington Channel, Austin Channel, Viscount Melville Sound, Prince Regent Inlet and Peel Sound. The Proponent intends to amend the scope of previously approved activities to reflect the new routing of the research expedition and to include additional research methods. The program is proposed to take place from July to August, 2019.

According to the current project proposal, the scope of the amended project includes the following additional undertakings, works or activities:

- Undertake marine-based research activities along the Northwest Passage near the communities of Pond Inlet and Resolute Bay;
- Conduct limited ice-breaking activities, depending on ice conditions, if deemed necessary by the ship captain;
- Use of a remote operated vehicle (ROV), capable of vessel or ice-based deployment, with an operating range of a maximum 100 metres (m) depth and tether length of 300 m;
- Operation of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV/drone), capable of vessel or ice-based deployment, for aerial surveys of coastlines and ice floes;
- Use of a hull-mounted split-beam echosounder to examine mid-water fish and zooplankton;
- Use of a sediment multi-core device at up to five (5) sites for the collection of benthic samples;

- Usage of facilities onboard the M/V *IB Oden* for research, transportation, accommodations and as a marine research platform for thirty-eight (38) personnel to conduct the scientific expedition across the CAA;
- Continue to conduct marine-based research using previously approved methods, including a conductivity, temperature, depth (CTD) rosette, a hull-mounted multibeam echosounder, a lowered acoustic doppler current profiler (LADCP), and vertical plankton net tows;
- Continue to collect atmospheric and seawater measurements and sampling;
- Continue to conduct visual seabird and marine mammal surveys; and
- Continue to undertake shore landings during expedition stops at multiple locations along the proposed route, including the Sirmilik National Park and the Prince Leopold Island Migratory Bird Sanctuary, by way of zodiac, small craft or helicopter, for the purpose of land-based educational activities and videography.

Inclusion or Exclusion of Scoping List

At this time, the NIRB has identified no additional works or activities in relation to the project proposal; however, the NIRB notes that the project is expected to occur partially within the Sirmilik National Park and the above scope as described includes the entire project activities.

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

All documents received and pertaining to this project proposal can be accessed from the NIRB's online public registry at www.nirb.ca/project/125457.

The documents received include:

- *NPC Screening Referral and Conformity Determination*
- *NPC Application and Conformity Questionnaire*
- *NIRB's Online Application Form*
- *Non-technical Project Proposal summary in English and Inuinnaqtun*
- *Northwest Passage Project Science Plan*
- *IB Oden Environmental Plan Description*

The NIRB will copy you on screening process related correspondence and upload related documents to the NIRB's online registry for public access. The NIRB may request additional information at any time during the process.

The NIRB is copying parties and municipalities potentially affected by University of Rhode Island's project proposal with this letter, and we invite interested parties to comment directly to the NIRB by **May 3, 2019**.

The NIRB would like parties to provide comments regarding:

- Whether the project proposal is likely to arouse significant public concern; and if so, why;
- Whether the project proposal is likely to cause significant adverse eco-systemic or socio-economic effects; and if so, why;
- Whether the project proposal is likely to cause significant adverse impacts on wildlife habitat or Inuit harvest activities; and if so, why;

- Whether the project proposal is of a type where the potential adverse effects are highly predictable and mitigable with known technology, (and providing any recommended mitigation measures); and
- Any matter of importance to the Party related to the project proposal.

Please note that *proposed* project-specific terms and conditions, should the project proceed, have been attached for consideration and comment (**Appendix B**).

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please send your comments to the NIRB via email at info@nirb.ca, via fax at (867) 983-2594 or via the individual project dashboard for this assessment on the NIRB's online public registry at www.nirb.ca/project/125457.

If you have any questions or require clarification, feel free to contact the undersigned at (867) 857-4566 or at ereimer@nirb.ca.

Sincerely,



Erin Reimer
Technical Advisor I
Nunavut Impact Review Board

cc: Distribution List
Geoff Clark, Kitikmeot Inuit Association
Tannis Bolt, Kitikmeot Inuit Association
Stephen-Williamson Bathory, Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Jared Ottenhof, Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Alexander Stubbing, Government of Nunavut – Department of Culture and Heritage
Sylvie LeBlanc, Government of Nunavut – Department of Culture and Heritage
Moshia Cote, Nunavut Research Institute
Lisa Pirie-Dominix, Canadian Wildlife Service
Jane Chisholm, Parks Canada
Mark D'Aguiar, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Transport Canada

Attachments: Appendix A: Previously-Screened Project Proposals
Appendix B: *Proposed* Project Specific Terms and Conditions

Enclosures (6): Public Notice of Screening (English, Inuinnaqtun and Inuktitut)
Comment Forms (English, Inuinnaqtun and Inuktitut)

APPENDIX A: PREVIOUSLY-SCREENED PROJECT PROPOSALS

The original project proposal (NIRB File No.: 18YN029), was received by the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB or Board) from the Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC or Commission) on April 24, 2018. The NPC noted that the activities associated with the proposal were previously reviewed by the NPC and the decision issued February 10, 2017 still applied, which included a positive conformity determination with the North Baffin Regional Land Use Plan (NIRB File No. 17YN016). The original project proposal was screened by the Board in accordance with Part 4, Article 12 of the *Agreement between the Inuit of the Nunavut Settlement Area and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada (Nunavut Agreement)* and Section 3 of the *Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act*, S.C. 2013, c. 14, s. 2 (*NuPPAA*). On July 13, 2018 the NIRB issued a screening decision pursuant to p. 92(2)(a) of the *NuPPAA* to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the then-Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard which indicated that the proposed project could proceed subject to the NIRB's recommended project-specific terms and conditions.

The University of Rhode Island (URI)'s (Proponent) original "URI Northwest Passage Project 2018" was located within the Qikiqtani (North Baffin) and Kitikmeot regions and encompassed several research sites from Resolute Bay to Cambridge Bay via Bellot Strait, including Lancaster Sound, Pond Inlet and Iqaluit. The Proponent indicated that it intended to study how waters of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago (CAA) have changed as a consequence of the secular warming trend over the Arctic Circle, during a scientific expedition aboard a research vessel (M/V *Akademik Ioffe*) along the Northwest Passage. The program was proposed to take place from August to September 2018.

According to the previously screened project proposal, the scope of the project included the following undertakings, works or activities:

- Undertake marine-based research activities along the Northwest Passage near the communities of Resolute Bay, Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, Gjoa Haven, Cambridge Bay, Clyde River, Qikiqtarjuaq, Pangnirtung and Iqaluit;
- Undertake shore landings during expedition stops to conduct land-based educational activities and videography;
- Use different equipment and instrumentations (i.e., Acoustic Doppler Current Profile, Conductivity, Temperature, Depth rosette, and Multibeam Echosounder) to monitor water conditions and collect bathymetric data along transits;
- Use of an autonomous underwater glider;
- Use of onboard laser absorption spectrometers to measure stable isotopes of hydrogen and oxygen in seawater samples;
- Conduct zooplankton net tows along the cruise track, and cataloguing of net contents in order to identify and quantify particles in seawater;
- Perform seabird counts and characterize the distribution and abundance of marine birds including marine mammals along the survey route;
- Collection and analysis of air and water samples with onboard laser spectroscopy instruments, as well as incubation of water to study microbial activity;
- Use of various hazardous chemicals for sample preservation;

- Storage of hazardous chemical wastes onboard and subsequent disposal in Halifax, Nova Scotia; and
- Usage of facilities on the M/V *Akademik Ioffe* for research, transportation and as a marine research platform for 36 personnel to conduct scientific expedition across the CAA.

The NIRB has previously approved ship based as well as land use activities including shore excursions associated with M/V *Akademik Ioffe* under NIRB File No. 12AN025 and noted that any activities related to the above project scope onboard the M/V *Akademik Ioffe* would be required to also abide by the terms and conditions issued for NIRB File No. 12AN025.

Appendix B
Proposed Project Specific Terms and Conditions

The following is a list of project-specific terms and conditions which, should the project proceed, may be recommended to be attached to any approval.

Aircraft Flight Restrictions

1. The Proponent shall not alter flight paths to approach wildlife, and avoid flying directly over animals.
2. The Proponent shall restrict aircraft/helicopter activity related to the project to a minimum flight altitude of 610 metres above ground level unless except during landing, take-off or if there is a specific requirement for low-level flying, which does not disturb wildlife or migratory birds.
3. The Proponent shall ensure that aircraft maintain a vertical distance of 1000 metres and a horizontal distance of 1500 metres from any observed groups (colonies) of migratory birds. Aircraft should avoid critical and sensitive wildlife areas at all times by choosing alternate flight corridors.
4. The Proponent shall ensure that aircraft/helicopter do not, unless for emergency, touch-down in areas where wildlife are present.

Ship-based Activities

5. The Proponent shall not deposit, nor permit the deposit of any fuel, chemicals, wastes (including waste water) or sediment into any marine waters.
6. The Proponent shall manage wastes (including domestic and debris) on board the vessel prior to final disposal at approved port facilities.
7. The Proponent shall ensure that all personnel are properly trained in fuel and hazardous waste handling procedures, as well as spill response procedures. All spills of fuel or other deleterious materials of any amount must be reported immediately to the 24 hour Spill Line at (867) 920-8130.
8. The Proponent shall, where practicable, coordinate with other vessels to minimize simultaneous vessel traffic in critical wildlife habitat areas allowing the wildlife to continue to use the habitat undisturbed (e.g. Navy Board Inlet, Lancaster Sound, Milne Inlet, Bellot Strait).

Vessel Craft-based Activities

9. The Proponent shall ensure that all passengers are aware of the Proponent's responsibilities and requirements regarding wildlife and wildlife habitat protection. This should include pre-landing briefings on wildlife sensitivities and potential hazards, proper wildlife viewing techniques and safety practices.
10. While on the research vessel or small craft, the Proponent shall limit viewing time of each concentration of marine mammals to a maximum of thirty (30) minutes in order to minimize disturbance.

11. The Proponent shall not attempt to intersect or interfere with the movements of marine mammals. Strategic positioning of vessels ahead of the path being traveled by mobile whales and waiting for the whales to pass is also prohibited.
12. The Proponent shall maintain a distance of 100 metres if a polar bear is encountered on land or ice while conducting activities from a zodiac or other small craft; all interaction with polar bears should be avoided if possible.
13. The Proponent shall ensure that visitation of cliffs used by nesting and breeding birds is restricted to small crafts or zodiacs only, and then only during morning and early afternoon hours. Noise should be kept to a minimum when visiting these bird colonies.
14. The Proponent shall ensure that all passengers are aware of the Proponent's responsibilities and requirements regarding archaeological or palaeontological sites that are encountered during land-based activities. This should include pre-landing briefings explaining the prohibitions regarding removal of artifacts, and defacing or writing on rocks and infrastructure.
15. The Proponent is strongly advised to provide sufficient advance notice to communities where a landing is planned as part of project activities.