NUNATSIAVUT
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NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Health study to explore links between Inuit diet and mercury exposure in Lake Melville

The Nunatsiavut Government and the Harvard School of Public Health has launched a study to examine potential links between the amount of fish and seal from Lake Melville eaten by Inuit and associated mercury exposures.

“Many Inuit living on Lake Melville are concerned about changes that have taken place from past flooding of the Churchill River, and of future changes that may occur when more flooding takes place once the Muskrat Falls project is completed,” says Nunatsiavut’s Minister of Lands and Natural Resoruces, Darryl Shiwak. “Inuit wonder if further flooding of the Churchill River will contaminate their country food with mercury, or if contamination has already occurred from past flooding. It is our hope that this information will be used to make sure that the Lake Melville environment and sources of Inuit country food are well managed.”

The research is part of the Nunatsiavut Government’s ongoing multi-year program *Lake Melville: Avativut Kanuittailinnivut (Our Environment, Our Health),* aimed at getting a better understanding of the the sources and dynamics of methylmercury (MeHg) in Lake Melville. It is funded in part through ArcticNet, a Network of Centres of Excellence of Canada.

The Lake Melville program will be used to study both the impacts on Inuit health of hydroelectric development on the Churchill River and the effects of global climate changes on levels of contaminants in country foods. Specifically, the Lake Melville Inuit Health Study will generate baseline information on methylmercury exposure and concentrations in country food from the Lake Melville ecosystem.

A total of 18 research assistants have been hired to collect data from Labrador Inuit living in Upper Lake Melville and Rigolet. The work is expected to be completed by the end of October, and will involve a dietary survey as well as an optional hair sampling program. Similar surveys, on a much smaller scale, were randomly conducted during this past winter and spring.

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