

Global warming impacting Greenlanders' daily lives

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Greenlandic fisherman Johannes Heilmann poses for a photo in front of the shipping harbor of Nuuk fjord. From his trawler that motors along the Nuuk fjord, Heilmann has watched helplessly in recent years as climate change takes its toll on Greenland. Global warming is occurring twice as fast in the Arctic as in the rest of the world.

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Heilmann, in his 60s with a craggy, rugged face from years of work in the outdoors, says he and his colleagues can no longer take their dogsleds out to the edge of the ice floes to fish because the ice isn't thick enough to carry the weight.

And yet the freezing waters with large chunks of

ice are too difficult to navigate in their small fishing boats, making fishing near impossible.

"We can't use the sleds any more, the ice isn't thick enough," laments Heilmann, saying he now has to rely on bird hunting, and sometimes seal hunting, while waiting for the summer months to go fishing.

At Ilulissat, more than 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of the Arctic Circle, Emil Osterman tells local daily Sermitsiaq how "in 1968, when I was 13, we went fishing in December in the fjord and the ice was several metres thick."

Now, more than 40 years on, the ice at the very same location at the same time of year "is only 30 centimetres thick."

The head of Nuuk's fishing and hunting association, Leif Fontaine, explains how climate warming is also affecting the region's shrimp industry -- Greenland's main export and biggest industrial sector.

"When the water gets warmer, the shrimp become rarer as they move further north," he says.

"And the melting ice is worrying, especially for the residents of isolated villages in the north and the east who only have sleds and no boats to hunt, fish and survive," he adds.

That has forced some hunters to let their sled dogs starve to death, since they can't provide them with the seals and fish they need to eat.

Polar bears that roam the ice also have an increasingly difficult time finding food, especially seals, as the ice floes melt. As a result they end up approaching villages in search of nourishment, presenting a danger to the locals and themselves.

In Nuuk, residents like Nana Pedersen and Sofus Moeller, two recent high school graduates, are worried about the changes to the climate.

They recall a snowstorm that took place on June 20 -- rare even for Greenland.

Moeller says he is "worried" about the changes, but admits that he doesn't think about it every day.

"I don't know if it's warmer than before, since winter after all lasts until May here," he says.

But at the new Arctic research centre in Nuuk, director Soeren Rysgaard has no doubts that [climate change](#) is having an impact.

"It's very visible in the Arctic."

Fishermen who pull up fewer fish in their nets or who can no longer fish in certain areas because the ice is too thin are those most affected right now, he says.

But the speaker of the local parliament, Josef Motzfeldt, notes that [global warming](#) has also brought "some good."

A growing number of tourists have come to Greenland to see how climate change is causing the North Atlantic island's enormous glaciers to melt, and new species never before found in Greenland are turning up, such as sea urchins and squid.

In southern Greenland, the longer summers are benefiting vegetable farmers, who are experiencing some of their most lucrative times.

"Trees are growing and the fields are full of potatoes, lettuce, carrots and cabbage" to be sold at the local market, explains Anders Iversen, who heads a plant nursery near Qaqatorq in the south.

Temperatures are warmer now, with the mercury sometimes rising above 20 degrees Celsius (68 Fahrenheit) in summer, he says.

"If global warming continues, we will be able to grow even more kinds of vegetables during a longer season," he adds.

The farmers' hopes could soon be confirmed by new worrying observations in Greenland's far north.

The [Arctic Sunrise](#), a ship belonging to environmental group Greenpeace, has recently arrived at the Petermann glacier, one of the region's biggest glaciers that is in the process of breaking up, where experts will study its developments.

For Greenpeace, the shrinking of the glacier is a clear sign that global warming is no longer "a theory, but a harsh reality."

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