

Barrow catches five whales; allotted more strikes

by Randi Somers

Special to the *Tundra TIMES*

Barrow whalers finished taking their quota of 16 bowheads Thursday, Sept. 19 in a marathon landing of five whales throughout the afternoon and evening.

But the whalers will be back out on the Beaufort Sea this week looking to make 14 more strikes.

The Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission met by teleconference Thursday and again Friday and authorized the transfer of 14 strikes from other villages' quotas, according to Maggie Ahmaogak, Executive Director of the AEWC.

Ahmaogak said the commission gave Barrow hunters carry-over quotas from Little Diomed Island, Gambel, Point Hope and Nuiqsut Thursday evening.

Another conference and more villages—Savoonga, Wainwright and Kivilina—added strikes from their quotas.

Kaktovik retained its remaining quota of two strikes, she said. Kaktovik, on Barter Island, had been



A whale gets butchered on Barrow's beach recently. Barrow met its whale quota after catching five whales in 24 hours.

allotted four whales; they've taken one and struck and lost one.

Before this year, such a transfer of strikes would require whalers receiving strikes from other villages to fly half of the resulting muktuk and meat back to those villages. A new carry-over provision adopted by the International Whaling Commission eliminates that requirement, said Ahmaogak.

Whales taken by Barrow hunters so far have measured between 27 and 48 feet. Ahmaogak said the last five were all in the small range.

Scientists from several countries gather on the beach with each landing to take measurements and gather tissue samples. Tom Albert, Deputy Director of the North Slope Borough Wildlife Management, said samples of stomach contents, skin

and other tissue provide, among other things, data on contamination of Arctic waters. Scientists do not know how to determine the age of the whales, though (see related story, page 5).

They wouldn't have gone out anyway, one whaling captain said, as the winds were out of the northeast at 20 to 30 knots, making the seas too rough for their small boats.

Borough officials, worried that whale remains would draw polar bears into the community, have ordered prompt cleanup and offered to pick excess blubber and waste from the yards of homes.

During the spring whaling season, whalers camp out on the ice, 10 to 15 miles offshore, and launch their skin boats in leads in the ice to hunt whales. Fall whales are landed on shore giving it a more of a family atmosphere, with whole villages flocking to the beach to celebrate and help butcher the whales. Crews and other villagers spend all night dressing the whales and then the feasts begin.

When more than one whale is taken, the party rotates from house to house.