

North Slope residents once again protest offshore drilling

By Linda Lord-Jenkins

Tundra Times Editor

Government representatives in Barrow to hear public comment on a proposed offshore oil leasing schedule last week were told that North Slope residents are tired of attending hearings to voice opposition

that those residents are uncertain means anything in Washington.

Tired but in no way willing to stop their opposition, said those testifying at a hearing on opening a large tract of land in the Beaufort Sea off Cape Hallett.

The hearings on the Diapur Field Sale Number 71 were held in Barrow, Nuiqsut, Kaktovik, Fairbanks and Anchorage last week with a large bulk of opposition to the plan being voiced in the North Slope.

The proposed sale includes major portions of the Beaufort

Sea which are located on or near prime subsistence hunting and fishing areas.

Annie Brower from Barrow told the panel "We are like a broken record. We never change what we say. We are against offshore drilling. We just see different people and

we say everything we have said before. . . then you come here and turn around and do things in a different manner."

According to terms of the lease sale, Secretary of the Interior James Watt will make a

(Continued on Page Sixteen)

North Slope Borough residents again voice opposition to drilling

(Continued from Page One)

decision on all offshore drilling lease sales in March. The Diapir Field tracts are scheduled to go on the sale block in September if Watt decides to lease them. A one-year start-up time is estimated for any first rig.

The total proposed lease sale area includes 372 tracts of ocean space. But, the proposed sale includes several alternate lease sale proposals including a two-year delay in the sale, a no sale alternative, an alternative which deletes 33 leasing blocks in the north/northwest portions of the sale area because of ice hazard conditions; the fifth alternate deletes 49 blocks in the Cape Hallett area which is an important area for Barrow subsistence activities for bowhead whaling and seal hunting;

Alternate 6 would delete 47 blocks in the southern portion of the Beaufort Sea in the Colville River Delta which is a highly productive wildlife habitat for nesting birds, migratory waterfowl, nesting birds, caribou and fisheries;

Alternate 7 would eliminate 37 blocks in the Southern Beaufort Sea between the Colville River and Prudhoe Bay which has a large seal and caribou population.

An environmental impact statement which researches all environmental, scientific, social and economic impacts on any oil lease sale stated

that six to nine oil spills exceeding 1,000 barrels of oil spilled, are probably over the 30-year life of the oil field.

The report also states that there is a 99 percent chance of finding oil in the sale area and the 1.8 million acre lease sale area probably holds 2.38 billion barrels of oil and 1.78 trillion cubic feet of gas.

Under the current proposal, the drilling activity would be conducted all months of the year except for September and October. There currently is a six-month summer drilling stoppage in offshore projects which was implemented two years ago to prevent an oil spill occurrence during migration of the bowhead whale.

At a recent Alaska Department of Natural Resources hearing held in Anchorage to discuss lifting that seasonal restriction, North Slope officials opposed lifting that seasonal restriction because of fear of oil spills during broken ice periods. The Tundra Times incorrectly reported that the seasonal drilling restriction was for the winter months instead of the summer months.

The Borough's opposition to lifting that summer drilling ban was continued at the most recent hearing with Lloyd Ahvankana presenting a statement on behalf of Mayor Eugene Brower who was ill.

Brower's statement reminded the hearing officers that "our renewable resources come from the sea. Our Native arts come

from the sea. Industry is not feasible on the North Slope." Brower added "On the North Slope there is no substitute for subsistence."

He renewed his opposition to any off-shore drilling in the Beaufort but also said, "I cannot condone or allow this to happen, but I'm a realist. In the past 80 years, the American people have been depending more and more on gas," and they need to get it somewhere," the statement said.

He said "The culture of the Inupiat is not considered sufficient in the eyes of the U.S. people to stop the lease sale," so he urged that if the sale can't be stopped, that it be delayed for at least two years to allow for more research and development of technology to clean up spills.

A delay would "Better enable us to assess the cumulative impact on the Arctic environment and the Inupiat to help preserve the culture from extinction."

Charlie Edwardson Sr., a Point Barrow village elder, told the group that "The ocean is a hazard. When the ice starts to move in the spring, nothing can stop it. Not when a piece is larger than 40 by 100 feet. No man-made thing can stand that," said Edwardson.

Noah Itta told the group that since the oil industry had come to the North Slope, prices in Barrow had risen greatly and he asked why that was happening.

Delbert Rexford, a whaling crew member and member of the Barrow City Council told the panel, "We are a special breed of people. We have advanced along with modern technology yet we have been able to maintain as a subsistence culture."

He said the "U.S. is trying to steal from the people who show love and respect for the sea and animals. He quoted Abraham Lincoln who said, 'No man is good enough to govern other men without the others' consent.' The white culture intrudes on the Inupiat culture by their desire to go into the Beaufort."

Ross Ahngasuk told the panel, "We've been talking, speaking and people from other towns have spoken against this. How is this testimony taken?"

He told the group that the "oil companies have not given ear to listen to the pleas of the Eskimos. After they have drained our land of oil, they want to drill offshore and damage the small animals that the big animals live off of. The oil companies look at Native people like a little bunch of children even though they have grey hair. They have no respect for our knowledge."

Barbara Bodenhorn, director of social services for the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, told the panel that putting drilling rigs in the Beaufort is like putting a nuclear reactor in a white person's back yard.

She said that the Inupiat look at the sea like their garden but white people had a difficult time understanding that because a garden is a hobby to them.

She said that the problem with the lease sales is that the people of the North Slope are getting a feeling of help-

lessness about their destiny because "somebody else is making a decision for that that has nothing to do with our lives, our living."

Robert Harcharek, director of technical assistance for the Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corp., said the UIC is categorically opposed to the drilling and said because of the delicate nature of the Beaufort Sea, "There is no room for error, no such thing as a second chance."

Harcharek said an oil spill would be "a blatant example of 20th century cultural genocide, would wreak social and political havoc on the area." He said one problem with the proposal is that "There is no sense of partnership with the people who must bear the brunt of the development."

Mike Jeffery of Barrow criticized the report because it did not include a National Marine Fisheries report on the impact.

He also criticized the report's refusal to talk about the lack of Coastal Zone Management plan and Jeffery told the panel that a law suit in California ruled that the Coastal Zone management plan must be considered.

He also was critical of the lack of a description of how clean-up of an oil spill would be conducted and about the liability in case a spill occurs.

At a hearing in Anchorage, numerous oil industry representatives spoke in favor of the sales. Their comments followed comments from Dick Wilson of the Alaska/Pacific Division of Exxon Company who supported immediate sale of the entire leasing area. Wilson maintained that the industry has the adequate technology to clean up any spills.

He also said that recent offshore oil spill statistics have shown a decline in spills which are good for the sale.