

Editorial —

Wanted: First hand knowledge of whale hunting

As we and many of our readers have noted in the past several weeks, the move by the International Whaling Commission to eliminate the take of bowhead whales by Alaska Natives seems to be based not only on ignorance of scientific fact, but ignorance of the crucial need that Native people have for this resource.

For years, the Commission has been unable to control the heavy international catch of whales, particularly by Japan and the Soviet Union, and has presided over the decimation of whale stocks of all species without enough scientific information to justify its action. Now, with the zeal of alarmists, the Commission has decided it is high time to do away with the centuries-old pursuit of the bowheads by Northern Eskimos.

Fortunately, a decision by the commission is not the last word on the issue. The United States can lodge a protest of the decision and seek to have it overturned; and Natives, conservationists and the Governor of Alaska have urged that the U.S. Government, through the Department of State, do just that.

It would be nice to think that the State Department could easily be persuaded to protest the IWC's ill-considered decision. However, past experience indicates that the needs and desires of a small group of American citizens are often misplaced in the shuffle of international intrigue.

We understand that Patsy Mink, a former U.S. Representative and now an Assistant Secretary at the State Department, may have a powerful voice in deciding whether the United States protests the decision of the IWC. Before any further consideration, it might be well for Assistant Secretary Mink to become acquainted with the dependence of Alaska Natives on the bowhead whale. There would be no better way to accomplish this than to visit the whaling communities themselves and talk to the boat captains and their crews. Such a visit would not only demonstrate concern on the part of a high ranking government official, but might be a true eye-opener for her. All too often, facts and statistics (in this case, those that support the continuation of Native whale hunting) are overlooked or misinterpreted because the person who is studying them does not have first hand knowledge of the subject.

In the interests of a wise solution to the whaling problem, and on behalf of Alaska's Native people who rely so heavily on the bowhead whale, we wish to extend an invitation to Assistant Secretary Mink and her staff to visit these northern shores and seriously consider informing the IWC that their action is inappropriate and unrealistic.

J.R.R.