



Photo by Bob Koweluk

Eskimo Walrus Commission Members (L-R) John Pullock, King Island; Art Omituk, Barrow; Matthew Iyya, Nome; and Roger Silook, Gambell, write up drafts of five resolutions passed by the EWC members during their meeting held in Anchorage last week on January 26 and 27. Resolutions were passed to delay Norton Sound Oil Leases, supporting additional walrus population studies, requested a minimum flight altitude of all aircraft over walrus, encouraged federal enforcement agencies to upgrade catching aircraft walrus headhunters and requested Eskimo observers to work with U.S. and U.S.S.R. marine mammal scientists.

EWC Proposes Stricter Monitoring of Walrus

by Bob Koweluk

Five resolutions were passed by the members of the Eskimo Walrus Commission at the conclusion of their meetings held in Anchorage on Jan. 26 and 27 in Anchorage.

A resolution was passed stating the EWC will work to delay Norton Sound oil lease number 57 indefinitely until adequate technology is developed which satisfies EWC requirements for safeguarding the environment and all animals within.

Of special interest was the use of light aircraft over walrus populations. A resolution was adopted addressing concerns for walrus populations' well-being, and the stress imposed on them by low flying aircraft passed. The EWC resolution requests FAA to enact rules which will require all light aircraft to fly at a minimum altitude of 1,500 feet to minimize the harassment of marine mammals. Another resolution was passed requesting the federal observers and enforcement agencies to upgrade their practices and enforcement on airborne walrus headhunters.

Resolutions were adopted supporting additional walrus and other marine mammal population studies, to monitor stress and the increase of contaminations that may occur with OCS development for the protection of the resources in the coastal areas.

The EWC also requested that Native scientists and observers join the joint US and USSR marine mammal studies. Alexander Akeya of St. Lawrence Island will join Dr. Bud Fay and Bob Nelson in studies to be conducted in Bristol Bay two weeks from now.

The retention of the Native exemption in the MMPA to take marine mammals for food, clothing, shelter and handicrafts was discussed following a presentation of HR-39 by National Parks Service, Bob Bellious, Bob Nel-

son and Bob Jones. According to Matthew Iyya, Subsistence Coordinator for Kawerak, Inc. in Nome, "The native exemption is not just a priority or preference as in other written Acts. It is the protection of our right to continue the way of life of the Alaskan Native tradition to take marine mammals for our food, clothing, shelter and handicraft."

Iyya said that the commission determined that it is possible for the State of Alaska to gain management of the marine mammals without adversely managing the take of these marine mammals.

Population reviews of marine mammals show that most of them are thriving despite subsistence hunting activities.

Studies show that the polar bear population has increased, with polar bears coming back to

areas they have not been seen in since sport hunting days.

The walrus population has at least doubled over the years and may have reached its maximum population levels. Concern has been expressed by walrus hunters that many walrus's stomachs are empty or have foods usually not in their diet. Hunters say also that many more walruses are slimmer, the meat more tough and not edible and that they have seen more walruses show signs of illness.

The only species that have remained stable are those that compete with the commercial activities in the coastal areas. Beluga populations compete with salmon fishermen, the spotted seal compete with herring and salmon commercial fisheries.

Studies have shown that the ringed seal and bearded seal populations have increased.