

# Marine mammals cited for cancelling lease sale

The U.S. Department of the Interior has canceled an offshore oil and gas lease sale proposed for the Chukchi Sea. In a February 9 internal memo, the Minerals Management Service (MMS) decision cites the concerns for the marine ecosystem expressed by environmentalists, Alaska Natives and fishermen as the first reason for the cancellation. The Chukchi Sea lease sale was planned to be held simultaneously with Russia for a

total of approximately 60 million acres.

The U.S. and Russian governments were working together to open both sides of the Chukchi Sea. This initiative was developed with no involvement of coastal villages or the wider public. Threatened by this proposed sale were Native subsistence resources and the Arctic marine ecosystem. The Chukchi Sea holds significant challenges to safe offshore drill-

ing operations. Heavy sea ice, darkness for much of the year and extreme weather all render oil spill response and cleanup virtually impossible.

"Offshore drilling in this area would put the sea mammals that our village depend on at risk. Canceling the Chukchi Sea lease sale is good news for our subsistence future," said Jonah Tokeinna, chairman of the Eskimo Walrus Commission.

"This decision is precedent setting. Finally MMS has allowed the ecological and cultural values of the Arctic Ocean to win out over the short-term profitability of offshore oil development," said Greenpeace spokesperson Dorothy.

The high cost of exploration and development in the Chukchi Sea and Today's depressed price of oil result in low industry inter-

est in the proposed lease sale. MMS made no promises that a lease sale in the Chukchi Sea will no be proposed in the future.

"The case for no offshore drilling in the Chukchi Sea has been established. We are happy for the reprieve but we intend to see to it that plans are not revived in the future," said Childers.

MMS is now developing the 1997-2002 offshore oil and gas