

# The Bowhead Whale Issue - Counting

Mixing the minds of whalers, scientists, government and industry representatives and conservationists yielded innovative strategies for counting the bowhead whale population at the First Conference on the Biology of the Bowhead Whale sponsored by the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and held in Anchorage January 26-29th.

The A.E.W.C. Science Advisory Committee drew upon ideas from all those at the meeting to compile a list of recommendations for increasing the accuracy of the annual bowhead whale counts. Briefly those recommendations include: expanded visual counts from ice camps, using whaling captains' logs which note whales seen, listening for whales with hydrophones (underwater microphones), high altitude photography, development of radio tags to determine migratory pathways of the bowhead.

A.E.W.C. Chairman Eugene Brower in his Conference address urged follow-up meetings with concerned groups to foster a cooperative method of

implementing the recommendations.

The Conference marked the first time the many groups concerned with the bowhead whale gathered to focus on the future of that marine mammal alone. And of the many issues surrounding the bowhead, population assessment was chosen, as Brower told conferees, because it is "the topic which is of greatest importance to us (the Inupiat people)."

Attempts to ban traditional Inupiat bowhead whaling were made in the past on various population estimates that showed the population dangerously low. Alaskan Inupiat whalers disputed those estimates. It took their organized action through the A.E.W.C. to successfully lift the ban on bowhead whaling and implement a whale management plan.

Continuing to show concern for the bowhead population, the A.E.W.C. has tried to get more accurate estimates of their numbers. As Brower said, "We regard this first conference as one in a series of steps

the Inupiat people have taken to demonstrate our concern for the bowhead."

Over the three days of the Conference short background papers and more detailed discussion papers were given. Discussion sessions were held and all those attending had a chance for input. Chairman Brower rated this give and take as a key ingredient in the conference's success.

"It was a very good conference. Everyone was treated equally. The scientists, industry people and the whalers were on equal terms. We got input from all sides."

Questions of bowhead population assessment had a special urgency this whaling season since budget cuts have eliminated any Federal support for whale counting efforts. The A.E.W.C. has received some State aid to continue counting efforts and other funding sources will be sought to implement the conference recommendations.

The First Conference ended with a banquet highlighted by the first public showing of whaling films from Sam Hon-

son, Sr. They demonstrated whaling conditions that many non-whalers at the conference might not see otherwise. Of particular interest, according to Brower, were the dangerous ice conditions shown. "The film showed a crew that lost a whale on the ice, then pulled it up again only to have the ice finally take it away."

The whalers attending the Conference included Rossman Peetok of Wainwright, Roger Silook Sr., Conrad Oozeva of Gambell, Burton Rexford of Barrow, John Oktollik of Point Hope, Joseph Noongwook of Savoonga, Luke Koonook Sr. of Point Hope, Peter Kippi of Atkasuk, David Brower Sr. of Atkasuk, Jim Allen Aveoganna of Wainwright, Herman Aishanna of Kaktovik, Arnold Brower Sr. of Barrow and Eugene Brower of Barrow. The Secretary of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) Ray Gambell was also present among some one hundred and fifty registered in attendance.