

# Food Discrimination?

The Natives of Alaska, especially the Eskimos, have been undergoing through some difficult obstacles lately. One of them, of course, was the feverish effort by the major oil companies, and some private individuals, to block the formation of Arctic Slope borough. The Arctic Eskimos managed to win a great victory over this challenge this week when the State Supreme Court Justice Roger Connors refused the oil companies' petition for a stay on certification of the North Slope borough election held last week.

And now there is another challenge afoot and this one hits one of the main food sources of the Eskimos — muktuk of the great bowhead whale. Ken Torgerson of the State Division of Environmental Health, said the muktuk is "inherently unsafe." In declaring that it was so, he also said things like this:

"It's stripped (the meat) out on the beach, where there is not a great deal of sanitation or care. Eskimos will eat a seal after deliberately letting it bloat."

This is another:

"The way the food is handled, throwing fish or game on the ground where dogs can urinate on it or in the neighborhood of dog feces."

These are indeed slanderous statements. They can even turn the stomachs of the Eskimos. Coming out of the mouth of a person we should respect, we now find it to feel a twinge of loathing attitude. We can't help this one because we feel degradingly insulted. The man is obviously not the right person to evaluate the worth of Native foods. He does not have the dignity to work with this assignment. He is obviously biased.

Muktuk of the bowhead whale is harvested out on Chukchi Ocean ice — not on the ground. It is then stored in underground meat caches fashioned generations and generations ago. The Eskimos have found this to be the best way to keep the muktuk and meat — in the permafrost temperatures so the contents are frozen even in the summer.

As the editor of this newspaper who grew up in the village of Point Hope, a whaling community, I still have to see any Eskimo who deliberately bloated a seal before eating it. That the Eskimos do so, is the most degrading statement. Also, I have never seen a dog urinate on any kind of food he craves for food — and any kind of food was, and is, his lifeline.

Perhaps Alaska Native foods should certainly be evaluated for their worth to humans but we do not see it the way it is being done by Ken Torgerson. We need to be informed properly and with dignity. We don't need insults along with the work.