

Walrus hunting continues

Current management of the Marine Mammal Protection Act is contrary to the traditional, cultural, and nutritional needs of Alaska's walrus hunting communities and imposes unreasonable restrictions, the Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) concluded at a recent emergency meeting in Nome.

The meeting was held April 24 and 25 to discuss the implications of a recent decision by Washington, D.C., federal court Judge Harold Greene. Judge Greene said that the Marine Mammal Protection Act permits Alaska Native to hunt non-depleted walrus in a non-wasteful manner for subsistence purposes or for the purpose of creating and selling authentic Native articles of handicraft and clothing.

Greene's decision came when he refused to dismiss a class action suit challenging the return of walrus management to the State of Alaska. The suit, bought by Togiak Natives, maintains that the State of Alaska may not regulate the harvest of walrus by

Natives because they are specifically exempted from regulation by the Marine Mammal Act.

But, Commissioner Ronald O. Skoog, of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, (ADF & G) pointed out recently that Judge Greene has not made a final decision in the case. And he said his department intended to continue to enforce regulations that prohibit walrus hunting on Round Island in the Walrus Island Game Sanctuary.

The EWC said it favored federal management of Alaska Native taking of marine mammals, but would support state management of sport hunting, with the provision that no more than 150 animals per year be permitted for sport taking. The commission discussed also the current ADF&G regulation limiting the caliber rifle used for the taking of walrus.

State regulations limit the caliber of rifle used for walrus to .264, which the commission said was unenforceable unless the enforcement officer is right with the hunting crew. The regulation was also called

discriminatory because gun owners who do not own that caliber of rifle are prohibited from hunting.

"The regulation effectively discourages the hunting crews using proven hunting methods and materials," said the commission.

As to the taking of ivory, one of the state's prime concerns, the commission suggested that any exportation of raw ivory outside the state be prohibited except for those who validly hold the 150 sport hunting permits they suggest.

Although the commission was critical of state efforts to regulate the walrus resource, it urged all hunting crews to make every effort to salvage all edible portions of each walrus caught and asked villages to cooperate with the &G in efforts to study walrus and the species' natural mortality rates.

Caleb Pungowiwi, Chairman of the Commission, asked on Tuesday that all walrus hunters bring in specimen samples of walrus they take in order to help gather data for biological studies.