

Cousteau for Inuit

From the Arctic Coastal Zone
Management Newsletter

In Seattle for the "Involvement Days" conference of the Cousteau Society, famed oceanologist Jacques Cousteau met with Barrow whalers to discuss plans for four Arctic expeditions and studies of the bowhead whale. Contacted by a letter from Theresa Pederson of Council, Alaska, now a student in the University of Washington and a spokesperson for the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC), he agreed to meet with the group after his major address on the U.W. campus October 28. With him was Dr. Wenk, an Adviser of the Cousteau Society and the Director, Social Management of Technology Program of the University of Washington. Also at the meeting was Ms. Pederson accompanied by scientific aide Edward Szafran, Dale Stotts, Fish and Game Commissioner of the North Slope Borough, Roger Siluk, Gambell Whaling Captain and a Commissioner of the AEWC, and Abraham Kaningok, Gambell Whaling Captain.

After reviewing the IWC on the moratorium of bowhead whaling with the group, Cousteau remarked that Western culture "could not destroy the Inuit." He went on to say that the IWC had made mistakes in the past and certainly had no jurisdiction over subsistence whaling. "If I were you," he said, "I wouldn't pay any attention to the ban."

Then after being apprised of the Inupiat environmental activities in the Arctic, he commended them for it, especially for "their concern and care for this remarkable specie," the bowhead whale. He was most concerned that plans for the study and management of the bowhead stocks proceed in the best possible manner and in an

animated conversation that followed, discussed ways that his own plans for Arctic studies could further that goal. He was most pleased with work and resolutions of the ICC, especially the resolution calling for the de-militarization of the Arctic. He mentioned that the Antarctic was protected by treaty and it was significant that the proposal to do the same for the Arctic was initiated by the Inuit. He promised to use his own influence to see that come about.

Cousteau revealed that he had planned to do some extensive film work in the Arctic in 1980, but became so engrossed with the present plight of the Eskimos that he told his staff members, "We'll have to move

up the schedule to help meet the temporal pressure against the Eskimos."

At this point the discussion was directed entirely on plans for the four Arctic expeditions, now slated to begin next year. One would cover the Arctic Coast and the bowhead whale; the second the Siberian Coast; the third, a trip to the North Pole; and the fourth, a trip over the top of Greenland. Cousteau immediately asked the

whalers for advice on vessels and equipment to use and showed great sensitivity to their knowledge of the ice. At one point Siluk and Kaningok explained how whale strikes at one point near St. Lawrence Island produces flight responses in whales 30 miles distant. Kaningok also described the complex differences in bowhead whale color which preclude the taking of certain whales by Gambell whalers.

Cousteau welcomed the promises of support and cooperation of the whalers in planning and operation of his expeditions and said he expects his first crews to arrive in March, 1978. He said he wants to attend the ICC Interim Committee meeting in Washington, D.C. in November and told Ms. Pederson, "Your letter has not been wasted."