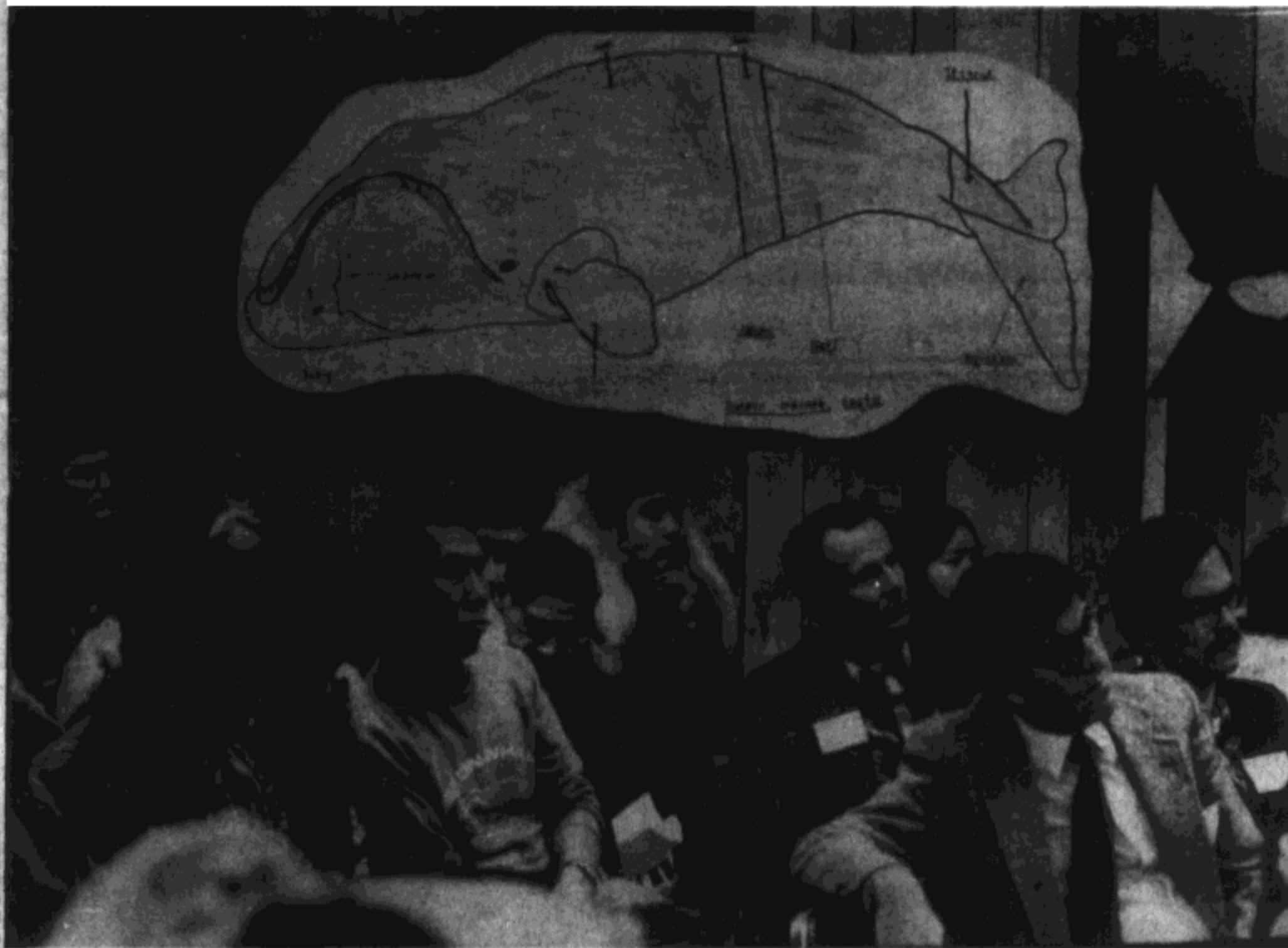


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Quota discussed by AEW

By BILL HESS

Tundra Times

Bowhead whale counts are up. Alaska Eskimo whalers would like to see the quotas which have held the bowhead catch to severely depressed levels the past two years come up too, or even be lifted entirely.

Representatives from virtually all of the approximately 120 whaling crews of Alaska's whaling coasts gathered in Barrow last week and in a closed meeting of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission decided what quotas they would seek for the 1983 and 1984 whaling season.

AEWC executive director Marie Adams said that each of the nine whaling villages made their recommendations which will be taken to the negotiating table with government officials at a meeting to be held in Anchorage March 10 and 11.

"We can't give out the num-
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When whalers representing approximately 120 crews from all of Alaska's nine whaling villages gathered in Barrow last week, they did so with the International Whaling Commission's quota in mind. Recent studies on the bowhead whale have shown the animal to be more numerous than many scientists had previously believed. Whalers would like to see the quota, which has caused much grief on Alaska's Northern Coast, raised or eliminated. Government officials from Washington, D.C., also met with the members of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission.

Whale population high: will quotas follow?

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bers before then," Adams said. "It is very sensitive."

On Sunday, the Anchorage Times ran an article stating that Dr. John V. Byrne, head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. delegate to the In-

ternational Whaling Commission, had said there is little chance of getting an increase in the quota for this year, and indicated that pressure from some member countries of the IWC could eventually shut down Eskimo whaling altogether.

It was learned that the IWC

to 45 whales landed or 65 struck over a three-year period. Under the AEW, the whalers reluctantly voted to go along with the quota, until they could prove to the world that the bowhead population was healthier than was widely believed, and that they were capable of managing their own hunt.

Under the quota, the whalers would receive 18 strikes this year. A separate "cooperative agreement" worked out with the United States assures the whalers the right to manage their own hunt, as well as a minimum of 19 strikes over the next five years, with more possible.

Although Byrne was warmly received at the AEW meetings, and seemed to come off strongly in favor of establishing whaling regulations more acceptable to the Eskimo people, some whalers have expressed annoyance over his published statements on the quota.

In light of the new numbers, it is not hard to understand the hunters' annoyance with the quota system. In 1978, for example, when the bowhead population was believed (by the NMFS) to be only 800, whaling crews struck 27 whales and landed 18. Last year, with the estimates up to 2,264, the quota gave them 19 strikes.



Roger Silook, chairman of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, bows his head during a moment of silence in memory of whaling captains who have died over the past year.

This year, with the estimates at 3,857 minimum, the quota would allow the hunters far less strikes than they had in 1978.

In the past, the hunters have sought an allowable strike of up to two percent of the best-known population estimate of the whales. Under that guideline, they could conceivably strike more than 70 whales with current population estimates.

According to Byrne, the U.S. has adopted a policy of supporting the hunters, and in going to the IWC with the intention of "adopting a policy we can all live with."

However, said Byrne, the U.S. finds itself in an awkward position in the IWC. The organization, which is made up of 39 countries from around the world, has taken the position that commercial whaling is to be stopped worldwide over the next two years. The United States has been a strong advocate of putting a halt to commercial whaling.

At the same time, the U.S. is coming out strongly in favor of aboriginal hunting. Most of the other nations do not understand the cultural and biological needs the Eskimo have for the whale, Byrne said, and seek to eliminate their hunt as well. They don't want to see whales killed, period.

Nations who have put a halt to their own commercial whaling enterprises are especially likely to strike back at the U.S. through the aboriginal hunt, Byrne said.

Last year, Spain introduced a motion into the IWC plenary committee to impose a "zero" quota on the Eskimo. A majority of the 39 nations voted to support that quota, but the vote fell short of the three-

fourths needed under IWC regulations.

Although Eskimo whalers have been reluctantly going along with the IWC quota up till now, they do not recognize the IWC's jurisdiction over them. Before 1977, the whalers had always regulated and controlled their own hunt. Then, the IWC, an organization which most of them had never even heard of, suddenly hit them with a "zero" quota, saying they could take no bowheads.

The whalers fought that and won. Now, through the cooperative agreement with the U.S., their right to manage their own hunt is secure. After the close vote in the IWC plenary committee, Byrne said the U.S. went to work and convinced the IWC to accept an "aboriginal" scheme separating subsistence hunting from commercial. As a result, Byrne noted, even the IWC now recognizes the right of Alaska Eskimos to regulate their own hunts.

So why worry about the IWC at all? Alaskan whalers have been successful doing things their way, why not continue? Under the cooperative agreement, the U.S. and the AEW could reach their own terms and conduct the hunt as they see fit, whatever the IWC says.

The trouble, Byrne noted, is that if the U.S. were to do this, the nations currently involved in commercial whaling could use that as an excuse to also ignore any IWC regulations. They could keep hunting whales worldwide, and devastate whale populations.

This leaves the U.S. in a potentially serious situation. On the one hand, the govern-

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ternational Whaling Commission, had said there is little chance of getting an increase in the quota for this year, and indicated that pressure from some member countries of the IWC could eventually shut down Eskimo whaling altogether.

"I think he's making some statements that are a little premature," Adams said. "We don't know how it will turn out yet. We won't know that until March, when the AEW will take its proposals to the negotiating table."

Although Adams could not comment on numbers, she readily admitted that with the scientific data which has been made public on bowhead populations in recent months, the sentiment among whalers is that quotas should come up

and the scientific community have accepted two recent studies, one conducted by the North Slope Borough and the other sponsored by Sohio and nine other oil companies, which place the bowhead population at a minimum of 3,857 animals, as probably accurate.

In the past, surveys conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service had indicated much smaller populations. Although Eskimo hunters insisted that there were more, in 1982 the scientists estimated the bowhead population at 2,264 and declining. In 1978, they believed bowhead numbers to be as low as 800.

With this erroneous information, the IWC passed a quota in 1981 which, if followed, would limit the hunters



PHOTOS BY BILL HESS

Mr. and Mrs. Elijah Attungana and Mr. and Mrs. Luke Koonook, of Point Hope, perform a spiritual song composed by Dorcas Akeya from Savoonga during a special "Sing-irapirap" held for the whalers at the Barrow Presbyterian Church.



U.S. Senator Ted Stevens admires some baleen model ships made and given to him by Harry Brower.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Whalers: We respect government but day might come when we go with the whales

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ment has an agreement with the AEWG that Alaska subsistence whaling will continue. On the other, it has a commitment to the IWC to support laws the international organization comes up with.

If the IWC should ever vote to put an end to subsistence whaling, the U.S. government will be forced to break its promise to someone, either to the Eskimos or to the world.

For their part, the members of the AEWG have done a remarkable job of demonstrating restraint and good will. While the scientific community was busy trying to learn what they

already knew, the Eskimos have abided with rules and regulations which have hurt them.

Merlin Koonooke, a captain from Gambell, noted that it was frustrating last season to bring his boat back to shore after the St. Lawrence Island quotas were filled, despite the bounteous numbers of whales still swimming by.

"When we catch a whale in Gambell," he explained, "the first thing we do is divide it in half. Half of it goes to Savoonga. Then we take the other half and divide it among each of our 22 captains. Then the captains divide it among each of their crew members. We take this and share it with family and friends in Nome, Unalakleet, and other villages. This doesn't leave a person with very much muktuk!"

Frustrating as it was, Koonooke explained why he brought his boat in even while there were whales to be caught. "We respect our government. We respect our president. We respect the people of NOAA. We want to co-operate, to get along!"

Koonooke paused, then suddenly stomped one foot upon the ground. "But someday, we're going to have to say 'enough!' and go on out with the whales!"