

# State of Alaska bids to take over marine mammal management

The issue of subsistence hunting moves to the forefront again as the State of Alaska makes a bid to take over management of certain marine mammal species living along the coastal areas of the State. At this moment, the State manages only the walrus; but if the Federal Government accepts a new state proposal to manage and regulate seals, otters, polar bears, sea lions, and whales, then control of these mammals will shift to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

A Federal Administrative judge, Malcolm P. Littlefield, will conduct hearings in Bethel, Nome, and Anchorage during late June and July in order to obtain testimony of the feasibility of the State proposal. If the proposal, as drafted, is accepted, it could have a serious impact on subsistence hunters for it would spell an end to the Native exemption from hunting

regulations embodied in current Federal Law and place all hunters in Alaska new regulatory control.

In preparation for the hearings representatives from the Nome, Kotzebue, Dillingham, and Bethel areas of the State met in Anchorage on June 17 and 18 to familiarize themselves with the State proposal and discuss its implications. The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, and end the moratorium on the hunting of marine mammals which now applies to all persons except Alaskan Natives living in coastal areas (who are specifically exempted by the Act).

The result would be State control of sea mammals, and new regulations which would open such species of mammals to hunting by sportsmen and commercial interests, and place controls on the subsistence use of the mammals.

There appear to be two issues involved according to Norman Cohen, an attorney representing Nunam Kitlutsisti, a Bethel based conservation advocacy organization. First, the state attempts to do away with the Native exemption (written into the Marine Mammal Protection Act by Congress) by way of administrative regulations; and second, to what degree the proposed regulations would open hunting of sea mammals to sportsmen and commercial interests. "Subsistence is number one," says Z. William Barr of Shismaref, which sums up the feelings of those at the meeting, who also agree that any attempt to do away with the Native exemption would hurt subsistence hunting, a result which is unacceptable to them and their people. "I don't see how they can do it," it's written right in the act," commented Morris Kiyutelluk, also from the Nome area. It seems clear, however, that the intent of the proposed regulations is to eliminate the Native exemption.

Participants at the meeting concurred that opening sea mammals to sports hunters and commercial interests, with control, is not necessarily bad; but should not be done at the expense of subsistence hunters. As Tom McKenna of Mauneluk in Kotzebue said, "If they want to expand the group of persons who can hunt the sea mammals then that is one thing, and we realize that the new regulations would permit Natives to sell skins again too. But they sure shouldn't strap regulations on subsistence hunters in return because it is not a fair trade."

Hearings on the state proposals are scheduled to be held in Anchorage on June 29, in Nome on July 6, 7, or 8, in Bethel on July 12, and again in Anchorage on July 14. Those at the meeting expressed hope that many people will attend the hearing and place in testimony of their own thoughts on the Native exemption and the proposed state regulations.



DAVID FRIDAY, Nunam Kitlutsisti, Bethel, Norman Cohen, Alaska Legal Services, Bethel; Tom Ellana, Nome also attended Pre-Marine Mammals Hearings Meeting.