

# Letters to the Tundra Times

## Comments on Proposed Beaufort OCS Leasing

December 15, 1979

Mr. Frank Gregg, Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
Attention 540  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

RE: Comments on Leasing on  
the Outer Continental Shelf  
Beaufort Sea (Tentative Sale No.  
71)

Dear Mr. Gregg:

These comments are being offered to you on behalf of the communities of Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, and Barrow, in response to the Call for Nominations and Comments on Areas for Oil and Gas Leasing/Beaufort Sea OCS (Tentative Sale No. 71).

The call for Nominations and Comments covers the incredibly broad area of the entire Beaufort Sea, from Point Barrow to the Canadian Border, from the three mile line out to the 200 meter water depth. These three communities are already so concerned about the Joint Federal/State Lease Sale that they have joined in the lawsuits to prevent the leasing there. The comment that they have on this new, and even more outrageous proposal of the federal government is **DO NOT LEASE OFFSHORE IN THE BEAUFORT SEA**. There have been discussions among these communities about whether or not leasing should be done inside the barrier islands,

but that discussion is not relevant to the new federal proposal. This new "Tentative Sale No. 71" is entirely in areas outside barrier islands. It includes the obviously extremely high risk area of the pack ice and the shear zone of ice where the pack ice meets the lands fast ice. It includes the sensitive river delta areas of the Canning, Colville and other Arctic rivers. It includes the entire fall migration route of the bowhead whale, and a significant part of the spring migration route east of Point Barrow as well. It also includes the area near Smith Bay where the bowheads congregate, for unknown reasons, on their fall migration.

The Beaufort Sea sale of 1979 looks insignificant in comparison to this vast new proposal. And the Beaufort Sea sale of 1979 has been steadfastly opposed by local residents who have the greatest knowledge about the area. The appeal to the courts has not gone unnoticed. I am enclosing for your information, and I hope your earnest reflection, the Memorandum and Order issued by US District Court Judge Aubrey E. Robinson in the lawsuits brought by the North Slope Borough, National Wildlife Federation, and the Village of Kaktovik, and others, against the 1979 Beaufort Sea sale. Some of

the issues he discusses, principally about the Environmental Impact Statement, might be solved in later lease sale Impact Statements. But his statements about the duties of the Department of the Interior are important for your immediate consideration. Judge Robinson states that

Plaintiffs have made a substantial showing (1) that the lease sale will jeopardize the existence of the Bowhead whale, and (2) that the Secretary has not insured that the sale will not jeopardize the Bowheads' existence. (Slip Opinion, 12/7/79, page four).

He was talking about the ½ billion acre 1979 Beaufort Sea Sale. Can the Bureau of Land Management seriously believe that this brand new proposal for possibly opening millions more acres in even more dangerous Beaufort Sea waters is going to comply with the federal laws? In comment letters on the Beaufort Sea sale, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration could not guarantee that the necessary information about the effect of ½ million acre 1979 lease sale on the Bowhead could be gathered by 1981. Yet your agency is steadfastly

(See LETTERS, Page 13)

# Letters

(Continued from Page Two)

pushing ahead, according to your published schedule with the idea of leasing so many times more acreage in the Beaufort Sea. The new proposal will require years more study.

Finally, I am enclosing for your information several other documents concerning the opinion of local people about the Beaufort Sea leasing idea. As you know, there were recently public hearings about the Proposed Five Year Lease Plan of the Department of the Interior. That plan includes the sale you are now offering for Nominations and Comment. I am enclosing a copy of my testimony on behalf of these three communities, as well as resolutions from Point Lay, Point Hope and Wainwright, that oppose both this Beaufort Sea sale and the planned 1985 Chukchi Sale. The danger from oil spills, noise pollution, accidents from human error and ice movements and the continuing impact on subsistence hunting from these activities are all of concern to these communities.

An additional reason for delay is that the Coastal Zone Management Program for the Mid Beaufort Sea area is still not approved. It will take many years

for the North Slope Borough and other government agencies to gather the necessary information about the rest of the Beaufort Sea coast line to allow the drafting of an adequate coastal zone management program for the rest of the Beaufort Sea. To push ahead with new sales in the Beaufort Sea before the regional government of local people of the area is prepared to use its rights under the Federal and State Coastal Zone Management Acts is directly counter to the legislative judgement in these Acts that local governments must be actively involved with regulation of offshore activities on their coastline.

The residents of these three communities, and countless other North Slope residents, are hoping that the federal (and state) governments will delay leasing plans in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas for many years so that the problems of limited industry technology and limited scientific knowledge about the Arctic can be resolved before even more drilling is allowed in the Arctic offshore.

Raymond Neokok, Sr., of Barrow, also testified at the Proposed Five Year Lease Plan hearing in Anchorage. He summed up the issue succinctly. He knows very well about the still-flowing Ixtoc I exploratory well blowout in the Gulf of Mexico. He testified that "[i]f a Mexican oil still happens in the Beaufort Sea, I'm dead." Please don't let that happen, Mr. Gregg.

Sincerely,  
ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES  
CORPORATION  
Michael I. Jeffery  
Attorney