

UTA passes resolutions on leasing, child welfare

by Louise Donhauser

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After a four-day meeting in Anchorage, the United Tribes of Alaska passed resolutions dealing with the Norton Sound Oil and Gas Lease, the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Marine Mammals Act.

UTA passed a resolution stating their objection to the federal government's proposed oil and gas lease sale in the Norton Sound basin. The lease is tentatively scheduled for October, 1985. Federal spokeswoman Beverly Sires said, "Things could change for various different reasons. We're in the information-gathering step now."

UTA vice-chairman Sheldon Katchatage hopes things will change before 1985. He described the lease sale, which is in the Northern Bering Sea, as being "in my back yard." He added that many Alaskans aren't concerned about the sale because they didn't think it affected them.

"If they can violate our hunting resources it might be your backyard next," he said about the federal government proposing lease sales near Unalakleet.

"All our resources are water-born. . . tomcod, smelt, herring, walrus, seal, whales. . . all those must go by the Norton Sound." In reference to the sea-living creatures he said, "They don't say, 'ok we'll stay out of the Norton Sound.'" He added that sea life has to pass through the proposed lease area. Oil and gas development would harm the species he said.

Also in the area of marine wildlife, UTA passed a resolution opposing state take-over of the 1972 Marine Mammals Act which gave the federal government jurisdiction of 32 species of marine mammals,

which only Natives can hunt.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game biologist Don Calkins said after 1972 the state did attempt to regain control of five species of seals, steller sealions, walrus, sea otters, beluga whales and polar bears.

But he said Governor Bill Sheffield requested a study to find out if Alaska's population supported state management.

"For the last 10 years we have been trying to get management back. The governor has put a stop to that. Now we're trying to assess the people's desire."

Regardless of state opinion, UTA opposed state management.

UTA said if the state takes over management of the 10 species the state will probably set up a system which includes issuing permits to hunt the mammals.

He outlined a scenario of what might happen under state management. "They will allow walrus hunting permits to Native people who apply. It is a demise to start a permit system. If they do that with walrus they will do it with ducks and geese. They (state) say they would be stimulating the economy of villages. Then you know the Ron Zobels will say 'hey, you're violating my rights.'" Another said if the state does take over, people would hunt not for subsistence but for the sake of being head hunters.

Those who attended the meeting also objected to the state's role in the adoption of Native children.

One participant said, "Most of the proceedings (adoption) are handled through the state social services. Tribal governments aren't aware of these proceedings."

Charlie Kaireiuak of Chefornak said in one Tunnak incident when the tribal government intervened several children

were allowed to remain in the village.

"Due to the death of a Native wife, two children were taken to Seattle. The State

of Alaska Social Services didn't inform the tribal council. The village of Tunnak found out that the state government was required to contact the village.

The children were brought back. Alma Upicksoun also said the Native American Rights Fund will provide legal assistance to tribal governments in Alaska.