

Walrus panel, F&W Service sign agreement

by Steve Pilkington

for the Tundra Times

Members of the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game met last week to sign a Memorandum of Agreement designed to promote wise use of the Pacific walrus.

Signing the agreement Thursday were Walrus Commission Chairman Jonah Tokienna of Wales, Fish and

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Wildlife Regional Director Walter Stieglitz and Alaska Fish and Game Commissioner Don Collinsworth.

The agreement "formalizes the ongoing efforts of the community and the state and federal governments to better manage and enhance the cooperation concerning the Pacific walrus," Stieglitz said. The agreement focuses on research, law enforcement and management.

The management of the walrus, as well as sea otters and polar bears, in the past has been the responsibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service, with the

Department of Fish and Game and the Walrus Commission cooperating to ensure effective administration.

The agreement, however, "opens a new door" because it brings the federal government and the state into closer liaison with the Eskimo Walrus Commission, Stieglitz said.

It calls for Native knowledge to be used in biological and other studies.

"We'll have to cooperate to manage the Pacific walrus," said Jim Baker of the Fish and Wildlife Service. "The local knowledge the Natives have will be utilized as much as possible."

The Walrus Commission will coor-

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—Jim Baker

dinate the work of Northern villages in gathering scientific data on walrus. Currently, five villages are providing 75 percent of the information used by the government agencies in biological research.

The agreement is consistent with the Marine Mammals Act of 1972, and it

represents completion of three years of work by the commission and the government agencies.

Also on hand for the signing ceremony was Jean-Paul Cornu, a representative of the Cousteau Foundation, which is working on a marine mammals film in Alaskan waters.