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Most Barrow whaling ends, dispute continues

By BILL HESS

Tundra Times Staff

There is a feeling of deep hurt among many of the people of Barrow.

Whalers there struck five bowhead whales early this month, without landing one. According to a quota reached between the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the International Whaling Commission, five strikes is all they get.

In a vote taken last Thursday, the Barrow Whaling Captains agreed to abide by the quota, but some whalers, led by Billy Neakok, President of the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, have vowed to keep on hunting, while Eugene Brower, President of the Barrow Captains Whaling Association has taken a strong stand to stick with the quota.

"We're not going to change our ways," Neakok explains from inside his home after returning from his camp on the ice. He had been searching, hoping to find one of the five whales which were struck, but now the weather has turned bad, and he has come in for a rest. "It was white man's bigotry, not technology nor science!" Neakok says of the



Simon Koonook sights a bowhead whale from the ice just off Point Barrow,

while Liam Antrium takes down scientific data on whales.

Neakok blames equipment failures for the loss of the wounded whales, which he says were able to elude the hunters

by ducking under young ice which had formed alongside older, grounded ice.

According to Marie Adams, executive director of the

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AEWC, Neakok struck and lost two whales, Arnold Brower Sr., struck one, Jacob Adams and Daniel Leavitt each struck one. Adams issued a statement

Monday saying that the AEWEC which represents licensed whaling captains in the nine traditional villages on the North Slope had instructed whalers from Point Hope, Kivilina and Barrow to cease whaling and bring their whaling equipment off the ice.

Point Hope succeeded in landing one whale and struck two whales — one over the limit, said Adams, but she said that because the two strikes came within minutes of each other, no action was expected to be taken.

The whalers in Kivilina met their quota of one strike but were hampered by ice conditions from bringing the whale in last Friday.

The AEWEC statement said: "The whalers registered under AEWEC agreed to cease hunting for bowhead whales, despite the nutritional and cultural hardships this imposes on their community.

"Billy Neakok, who is whaling but not a member of the AEWEC, and therefore not authorized to hunt whales under federal law, has been representing that Barrow whalers would not stop whaling after the strike limit had been reached in Barrow.

At a meeting of whaling

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hunt ends

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captains in Barrow after the strike limit had been reached, the captains unanimously agreed to abide by the quota established under the U.S./AEWC cooperative agreement.

According to United States federal law entered into the federal register on May 6, 1982, the U.S. Government says any person whaling outside of the U.S./AEWC cooperative agreement will be subject to a year in prison and up to \$10,000 in fines or both.

"Dr. John V. Byrne, administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the federal agency responsible for monitoring the bowhead whale hunt complimented the AEWC on the leadership it has exhibited in a very difficult situation.

He said, "I applaud the efforts made by the AEWC to assure that the bowhead whale hunt is managed in an effective and reasonable manner even during the most difficult of circumstances."

The quotas have been established because of international fears that the bowhead whale is declining. Neakok does not believe this, nor does he have any faith in the scientists who have concluded that the bowhead is an endangered species. "Any 15-year-old who has gone whaling has better scientific knowledge about the bowhead and the ice," he explains.

Neakok had sent a telegram to President Ronald Rea-



Eugene Brower cleans a shotgun in his home. Because Barrow whalers took no whales, Brower is encouraging his people to hunt as much other game as possible.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

gan on April 14, advising him of a tribal government decision through ICAS to keep the harvest of the bowhead within two percent of the best estimates of the bowhead population, rather than submit to the quota. The quota agreement allows the Inupiat to take 45 whales over a three-year period, with 19 for this year. That number has been divided among the different whaling communities of the Arctic Coast and St. Lawrence Island. Past estimates of the whale population have put it at about 2500, or 50 whales

a year if 2% were taken. A recent study in Canada has concluded that there are a minimum of 3000 whales, which would cause that number to increase further.

The telegram also noted the decision of an ICAS resolution that all government officials coming to observe the hunt and the whales would have to confront themselves to the tribal government, which, says Neakok, they never did.

Neakok sent Reagan another telegram on May 4, with copies going to the United Nations, the Russian Embassy

in Washington, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Secretary of the Interior James Watt, Governor Hammond, the AEWC, and the North Slope Borough. In it, Neakok charged that the quota had been set by "white pigs" like you."

"The Inupiat position is still 'the Inupiat level of harvest will be no more than two percent of the best known population.' Mr. Reagan, you have not responded to my telegram . . . If the United States is going to enforce the I.W.C. quota . . . then, Mr. President, you have three days to evacuate the citizens of the United States. If I, as an Inupiat captain cannot meet my people's nutritional needs, then you leave us no choice but to starve!" Neakok also claimed to have instructed whaling captains to continue with their work, and said he would notify the U.S.S.R. for detente."

Other whaling captains criticized the telegram at the Thursday meeting, objecting to the words "white pigs" and the evacuation threat. Many also

said that they had not been notified to keep on whaling, and that the feelings expressed were not those of the Inupiat community as a whole.

"It was the only way I got their attention!" Neakok says of the media and the politicians. "White pigs" wasn't the issue. The issue was whaling, and starving! But they weren't interested in that! I got their attention only when I called them names!"

Despite the Barrow Whaling Captains vote, Neakok claims that at least six other captains have committed themselves to go out hunting again, and to ignore the quota. They could face confiscation of equipment, fines and imprisonment.

"The Eskimos have always been a very kind and courteous people," Neakok stresses. "We share everything we have to the point of giving everything away. I don't think we're going to voluntarily starve . . . We need that blubber! Your science has said that! I am not pre-

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Barrow ends official hunt with no catches

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pared to change my diet!"

Neakok stresses the bowhead whale is more than food to the Inupiat.

Hunters do not just catch whales, whales give themselves to the Inupiat. Whalers must go out with good feelings. Neakok also states that the Inupiat language is precise in dealing with whales, ice, and the environment, and that there is much scientific knowledge in the language which cannot be expressed in English, and which scientists are still groping to learn.

"When you talk about a whale quota, our language does not accept such things. You don't set a quota or say how many whales you will take. Our scientific data is far beyond that!"

"...that's why we're still out whaling. Our whaling depends on conditions of the ice, and weather. Not on whale quotas set by people who it's none of their god-damned business anyway!"

Eugene Brower, president of the Barrow Whaling Captains Association and the mayor of the North Slope Borough is not happy with the quota either, but he sees things quite differently than does Neakok.

"It hurts," Brower says of the prospect of his community going without whale for the next year. "I guess this is just one of those unlucky years when things go wrong and no one gets a whale. You sure can't blame the whaling captains. They all worked hard. It was just one of those things that happens sometimes. There have been years in the past when no one took whales. We always survived."

"There's an old saying," Brower notes. "You don't squabble over the bowhead!" There has been a lot of contention in Barrow over the whale this year, Brower added.

In the Inupiat belief, Brower says, the bowhead sometimes sends a runner up to the village to see what is going on. His report can make a difference in how willing the whales are to give themselves to the village. "We have to be humble before this great animal."

Brower is adamant that the quota be maintained, even though no whales were landed in Barrow. "The whaling captains voted unanimously (those who were present during the voting at Thursday's meeting) and that is what we intend to do."

Brower believes that by sticking to the quota, Inupiat whalers will be more likely to win more favorable concessions on whaling in the future. "We can show the international community and our government that we are responsible people," he explained. "That we have tried hard to obey the

law. It's especially important this year. Because it's hard on us now. If we can hold to it, that proves our good faith."

Brower also expects a whale count which is currently taking place under the direction of the North Slope Borough to improve future prospects. The National Marine Fisheries Service has long maintained that bowhead populations are much smaller than they actually are, Brower contends.

In 1976, their estimate was that only 600 bowhead whales were left in the world. Compounding the Inupiat's difficulties, says Brower, was the fact that the United States took the lead in a world-wide effort to save many varieties of whales from hunters without distinguishing subsistence from commercial use. "Our own country, through President Carter, came out and said there should be a 'Q' quota for the world, including subsistence hunting."

In dealings with the IWC, the U.S. actually did set a zero quota for the Inupiat, which they fought against and won. The two percent figure came up in later negotiations, but the international community finally came up with the current quota, and the AEWEC voted to accept it,

although less than happily.

Although many whalers express distrust of the whale count currently being undertaken, Brower expects it to prove that the bowhead population is greater than non-Inupiat scientists have believed, and is, in fact, thriving.

Since its low estimate of 600 bowheads, the NMFS has steadily had to increase its estimates. The most whales spotted by them in a single counting has been about 1400, leading them to believe there are about 2500.

As of last weekend, the North Slope Borough counters had spotted 1100 whales, and as many as 30 an hour were passing by their perches on the sea ice. Although Brower readily admits that many whales will escape the counters' eyes, he fully expects more than 2000 to be counted, and says this should support the Inupiat belief that there are large numbers of bowhead, and that the population is not endangered.

"When this quota ends in 1984, it will be a whole new ball game," Brower contends. "We will go in armed with our own information, from our own research." The whale count is being conducted by a combination of Inupiat and

Outside scientists. "Then we will make sure everyone takes a hard look at this quota."

Brower suggests that after that, he does not expect the Inupiat to hunt by a quota, but probably to stay within the 2 percent level of whaling, which, he contends, could be quite high as a result of the whale count.

ICAS contends that since the AEWEC was formed by an ICAS resolution, the AEWEC is responsible to ICAS, and had no right to agree to the quota against ICAS demands. "The AEWEC has become a government of its own, out of control, and we've got to stop it!" says ICAS executive director Raymond Neakok. "If they want to play the corporate game, and live by those laws, and not Inupiat law, then we'll play the corporate game with them, and make sure they serve the Inupiat!"

ICAS, says Neakok, is demanding that all village representatives on AEWEC present certificates of election. So far, few have done so, ICAS, he stresses, is the tribal government of the Inupiat, with a sovereignty recognized and supposedly protected by the United States. "The Reorganization Act of 1934 was just that," he claims. "Just a reor-

ganization between our government and the federal government to allow us to contract with them. We didn't surrender our sovereignty. We have never been defeated. We have not negotiated our sovereignty away. We have a government to government relationship with the federal government," and, says Neakok, authority over AEWEC.

Brower disagrees. "When ICAS chartered AEWEC, it gave them the responsibility to do whatever was necessary to protect and enhance the population of the bowhead whale. Nowhere did it state that AEWEC had to be responsible to ICAS. That is what we are doing. Taking efforts to protect and enhance the population of the bowhead whale."

Later, on a Sunday afternoon, Billy Neakok is at his home, feeding caribou and soup to several guests, most of them whalers. Stories are coming in. Point Hope, it is said, has struck beyond its quota, and has taken two more whales, in addition to the one it took under the quota.

"We've got to get out there, and we've got to let the Point Hope whalers know they've got support," Neakok tells his friends. "I've got six captains, and we're going to go back out!"



Billy Neakok in his home, vitits with young Anthony Edwardson, son of Robert Edwardson

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