

NOME SEA MAMMAL HEARINGS

Eskimos Express Deep Concern for Mammals As Food, Crafts Sources

By LAEL MORGAN



LISTENING AND WAITING — Emma Willoya, waits between two friends for her turn to testify at the Congressional hearing in Nome on the Sea Mammal Protection Act. "Sharing and help-

ing each other," that's how the Eskimos have survived, she told the committee. Although blind, she walked straight and tall and she proved an articulate witness. —LAEL MORGAN Photo

NOME — Eskimo and Indian hunters laid aside their rifles and harpoons this week to travel hundreds of miles to testify at hearings held by the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee on the Sea Mammal Protection Act.

The legislation, which has already passed the House, would put a five year moratorium on the taking of all sea animals. An exception is made for subsistence hunting by Alaskan Natives but, as the bill currently stands, there could be no taking of an endangered species and no selling of products gained through the taking of any sea mammals.

Sen. Ted Stevens, who is ranking Republican on the Commerce subcommittee considering the bill, said it was not usual to hold local hearings while Congress was in session but that there was a need to learn what impact this act would have on Alaskans.

With Sen. Mike Gravel of Alaska also participating, he chaired hearings in Nome, Bethel and Juneau which attracted nearly 200 witnesses.

"This conference, whatever you call it, is something I don't know too well about," began

Edwin Tunguk 80, of Golovin, who like many Eskimo representatives had to struggle with English translation.

"I deeply concerned when they talk about seals. I know that much whiteman not a fool. He got big head. Someone outside in United States want to cut this seal hunting off. They must have seen something I haven't."

"Now we've got to have cash," explained Thomas Menadlook of Teller, who apologized because he had a language barrier.

"In the old days it was something known as trade. The only item we could get any cash income is sea mammal itself.

"How will we survive if it stops. You might just let my people die. I am an ivory carver like many people in my area. I am proud to say that I could supply my family. I have a family of five. I don't have to depend on welfare and I'm proud of it. I don't believe in welfare."

Margie Seeganna, Arctic Native Brotherhood, testified that her husband had a boat which required four walrus skins to cover and their oldest son needed four or five big oogrook for his craft.

"I don't think that we have a substitute for hunting like Native seal boots for going on sea. Our greens can last and last in seal oil. We don't have

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cold storage to preserve everything so that we learn from our forefathers.

"A pair of slippers would make a meal for a family. Welfare checks don't go very far."

Robert Willard, representing the Alaska Commission on Human Rights, reported that 10,000 Natives count on manufacture of arts and crafts products come from sea mammals. In addition, he said, over half the Native population receives some income from this source.

"We have survived to this day with an abundance of sea mammals," Frank Degnan, Eskimo leader from Unalakleet, said proudly.

"Out students on return from other parts of the world where this food is not in use, ask for it on arrival.

"Some Eskimos who live up here got educated and moved outside because they needed to improve their standard of living

capita with the settlement."

Testimony also came in to indicate Alaskan mammals are not as endangered as many scientists and television writers have lead people to believe.

"It looks like 2,000 to 3,000 seals come in on our ice," reported Martin Olson of Golivan. "They just like ducks out there sitting in a pond when you see heads come up out of the water."

John Burns and John Vania of the State Fish and Game Department reported the stella seal numbers of 300,000 and harbor seal population is 200,000 in spite of continued harvesting.

The sea otter population, according to their count, numbers 50,000 to 100,000 even though the state has harvested 2,463 and the Amchitka blast killed 1,000.

In addition, they claimed the bowhead whale population num-