

# Whaling commission favors amendments

The Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission favors a set of amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act signed into law recently by President Reagan.

Officials of the commission said they were involved in the drafting of the amendments, and they believe the changes represent a reasonable compromise between the subsistence interests of villages and the development interests of the energy corporations.

In a prepared press release from the commission, they also said the amendments strengthen the Marine Mammal Protection Act protections for the subsistence hunt of bowhead whales.

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The new law prohibits any form of exploratory or development activity which will interfere with the availability of subsistence resources. Activities which threaten such interference must be altered or provide for "mitigating measures" which ensure that the subsistence resources remain available.

In addition, the amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibit any activity which will have more than a "negligible impact" on a marine mammal species.

The previous restrictions on the incidental takes through harassment of endangered marine mammals have been eased. However, the permitting and review process to determine the degree of impact which any exploratory or developmental activity might have on marine mammals remain in place.

As in the past, these activities will be permitted only if they satisfy the existing provisions of the Endangered Species Act, and now they must also satisfy the "negligible impact" standard of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.



Whaling commission spokesmen said the combined provisions of the two acts should be sufficient to protect marine mammal resources from the adverse effects of energy exploration and development.

"Also, the new protections for subsistence activities provide stronger basis for protecting our subsistence hunting rights than we had under the previous version of the law, while at the same time, providing an additional basis for protecting our marine mammal resources, such as the bowhead whale," they said.

## *Caribou gather further west*

Recent caribou distribution surveys on the Seward Peninsula indicate that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd may be wintering further west than in previous years, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Caribou were observed as far west

as Imuruk Lake, about midway across the peninsula. The herd has come in contact with three reindeer herds, but as yet there have been no reports of major losses from the reindeer, which in the past have joined the migrating caribou.