

CAP ASKS ALASKA SEA MAMMAL HEARINGS

Native Arts and Crafts Jeopardized by Sea Mammal Legislation

On March 9, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1971 by an overwhelming vote of 362 to 10.

Congressman Nick Begich was "strongly in favor of what the bill sought to do — offer comprehensive protection to threatened ocean mammals and provide a system for thorough study and future planning for this invaluable resource."

However, Begich voted against the bill because the methods of protection were "too generalized to avoid substantial hardships for many Alaskans."

Those hardships would be felt by Native Alaskans who, under the House bill, would not be allowed to use marine mammal products such as ivory and seal skins in commercial arts and crafts activities and would not be permitted to hunt Bowhead whales.

Similar legislation is expected to be acted upon by the U.S. Senate in late April or early May.

RurAL CAP has asked that Senate hearings be held in Alaska where so much of the legislation

impact will be felt.

A RurAL CAP survey has noted that arts and craft income totaling about \$500,000 in 1970 wholesale value is part or all of the cash income of approximately 30,000 Alaskan Natives, and that people in about 90% of Native villages will be affected if commercial Native arts and crafts use of marine mammals is prohibited.

It appears unlikely that the U.S. Senate will hold Alaskan hearings on marine mammal legislation. But, RurAL CAP has been informed that there is a possibility that the Senate subcommittee which is chaired by Senator Hollings and which is considering this legislation will provide for commercial Native arts and craft use of marine mammals.

The Senate bill may also be amended to allow the taking of some Bowhead whales, possibly with some limits and management to insure that the Bowhead whales, reduced to being an endangered species by large commercial whaling operations, will not disappear forever from Arctic waters.