

U.S. drops whaling grand jury probe

Citing a new era of cooperation, the U.S. Justice Department last week announced it was dropping a grand jury investigation into Eskimo whaling.

In a statement published through the Anchorage U.S. attorney's office, the department said the signing of the agreement between the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration led to the decision to drop the investigation "to give the agreement an opportunity to work."

The grand jury investigation

began last year to look at allegations whaling leaders had encouraged whalers to ignore whaling quotas and to determine whether North Slope whalers had violated quotas set by NOAA and the International Whaling Commission.

Members of the AEWC had denied all the charges.

Two weeks ago the Alaska Whaling Commission signed an accord with NOAA which gives the commission policing powers over the whale hunt. The quota still falls within the IWC mandate of 17 whales taken, howev-

er, it allows 32 strikes and whalers can keep bowheads taken beyond the 17 by paying a fee for each extra whale. That can range from \$1,000 to \$5,000. The agreement allows the Alaska commission to allocate village quotas and fine members who violate the regulations. If violations of the two-year agreement occur, bowhead management would revert to NOAA.

The Justice Department did say it would continue to investigate the violations of the Whaling Act in the "unlikely event" that the agreement fails.