

Whaler responds to congressional statements

The following is an open letter to John Breaux of Louisiana, who recently called for a moratorium on subsistence whale hunting:

I am writing in response to statements you made as the Chairman of Fisheries Conservation subcommittee on Wednesday, September 28, concerning the bowhead whale. You have expressed an interest in the bowhead whale, and profess some familiarity with the subject.

Based on the figures of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) the United States has labeled the bowhead population off the coast of Alaska at around 3,970.

This figure, however, represents only a small percentage of one of the groups of whales which make up the Western Arctic bowhead herd. We know from the reports of Greenlandic Eskimos that another herd travels off the coast of Greenland and Barent Sea and Baffin Bay.

We know from the logs of commercial whalers, within the Western Arctic herd alone, there are three different groups of bowhead whales. One of these groups migrates up the coast of Siberia. The Russian report to the International Whaling Commission estimates the population of this group at around 3,400.

A second group migrates up the coast of Alaska to Beaufort Sea. NOAA's population estimate — 3,970 — represents a fraction of this group. A third group migrates the open sea of the Arctic Ocean. Western scientists have yet to study this

group.

You suggest that subsistence hunting be regulated by politics and not by science. In this you are quite correct — I doubt that you realize just how little science is actually involved here. Let me show you exactly how NOAA arrives at its bowhead census.

During the spring bowhead migration counters are stationed on the shore-fast ice on the edge of the open lead through which the whales travel. With sonar devices they can count whales out to a distance of 8 miles.

With their longest range equipment — a pair of binoculars — they can count out to a distance of 7 miles, weather permitting. Land stat satellite photographs, taken while the whale counters were at work, will show you that the open lead runs 50-75 miles wide and our whalers know from thousands of years of direct experience that the bowhead whale migrates all across the open lead.

We frequently catch whales in the 12 plus miles out range. NOAA's census covers at best only 3 percent of the area through which the whales travel. NOAA's official whale count — 3,970 — is clearly inaccurate to the point of becoming a national embarrassment.

These are the figures which you used when you suggested that subsistence whaling in Alaska be banned and the Inupiat be deprived of their culture and major source of their protein.

Let's start by determining the exact population of the

Western Arctic bowhead whale herd. This time let's use a cable hydrophone technique which is truly scientific, one which covers the entire area through which the bowhead whale passes, the Bering Straits. There is a less security problem way of counting the bowhead, that is to run the cable off Point Barrow to the edge of the pack ice, but this is going to be expensive.

Either way, you would arrive at a figure upon which intelligent discussion could be based. Should this figure indicate that the bowhead truly belongs on the list of depleted and endangered species then the Inupiat will be the first to fight for the whale's welfare.

We would, of course, insist that the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act be fully enforced, calling for a moratorium on all off-shore oil development activities.

If the bowhead is close to extinction then the United States cannot allow off-shore activities within their critical habitats, not in the name of free enterprise.

As a whaling commissioner with the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and whaling advisor to the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the welfare of the bowhead whale is my primary responsibility. The ICC has Non-Governmental Organization status with the United Nations and with this help the bowhead can go on living in harmony with the Inupiaqs.

Percy Nusunginya
Barrow

Morris Oviok thanks NSB voters

To the Editor:

It's been a challenging experience during these past five years running as the North Slope Borough School District School Board CANDIDATE. I've been very pleased with the votes. The only thing I can say is: We all are winners and thank you, NSB Voters.

There are many issues confronting us. I only want to re-

late our "Freedom of Choice."

The Natives relinquished their sovereignty when they accepted the ANCSA program in 1972. For the purpose of managing our own schools and other programs. It left no choice for the Bureau of Indian Affairs but to study the Alaska Native Affairs in 1962.

I believe majority of us have learned the western culture

and continued to keep our Native acts. When I talk about my Native acts, there is much to learn about the "freedom of choice."

With this thought, I thank the voters for their freedom of choice. The issues in education and local control have been my choices. I'd like to hear from you.

Uvigaq,
M. Oviok