

## Dual Issues in the Arctic

The beginning of a new year, a new decade, has proven to be a busy one for for Arctic Slope Inupiat. Court Battles, public hearings, charges and counter-charges have run their gamut, and the cycle will surely begin again. In the meantime, though, there appears to be very little time for the Inupiat and their lawyers to catch their breaths.

Oil development has posed serious threats to the Inupiat, but they have not been deterred in their fights to protect their land and waters, and subsequently their lives. Evidence is the creation of the North Slope Borough, the success of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, and the successful fight against the banning of whale hunting—to name a few.

Events have snowballed in the past couple of months. The Beaufort Sea lease sale went on as planned, earning the state and federal governments many millions. Hope was immediately rekindled when Judge Aubrey Robinson Jr. of the Federal U.S. District Court offered words of encouragement in the event of an appeal.

And now, a January 22, 1980 court ruling has breathed new life and hope into the classic sense of self-determination as practiced by the Arctic Slope Inupiat. The Beaufort lease sale has been partially halted, and the Natives and environmentalists have won another hard-fought round.

The buoyant feelings resulting from the Beaufort sale cancellation are only slightly dampened by the North Slope Borough's withdrawal of its Coastal Zone Management Plan that was submitted to the Coastal Zone Council. In the face of almost certain rejection, the Borough chose to instead confer with oil company officials to try to iron-out crucial differences and to expand the program to include the Arctic Coastal waters and lands.

While opponents of the Borough's Plan dislike the concept of local management—at least in the case of the Borough—such a concept is necessary to protect a people from unreasonable and narrow demands made for the sake of appeasing a restricted, but powerful, lobbying interest—namely, big business, and particularly, oil companies. Judge Robinson supported and upheld the People's arguments, proving that it is sometimes necessary to look beyond state courts that are understandably but wrongly prejudiced in favor of issues that favor the majority while ignoring the needs of the minority.

The opponents of Borough management of their lands and the proponents of oil and gas development (such as the Beaufort Sea lease sale) look to a plan's legality and its effect on millions of Americans and several hundred thousand urban Alaskans.

The Inupiat of the Arctic Slope search for the legality of a plan—and sometimes end-up questioning it in court—and they search for ways of buffering themselves and the lands and sea and their creatures from irreconcilable impact.

In the case of the lease cancellation, they proved their claim's legality and more. They fought against big business and narrow interests and, at least for now, they have won.

In the case of the Borough's Coastal Zone Management Plan, they are fighting for the acknowledgement and affirmation of the State of Alaska's Constitutional rights and a lifestyle. Once again, they have a strong case, and once again, we support them.