



ALASKA ESKIMO WHALING COMMISSION

P.O. BOX 570 BARROW, ALASKA 99723

April 24, 2018

Honorable Dan Sullivan
702 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Sullivan:

On behalf of the more than 150 whaling captains of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) and the many Native Alaskan communities with whom we share food resources, I would like to personally thank you for your steadfast support of our Alaska Native bowhead whale subsistence harvest. I also write in support of the bill you have sponsored, entitled *The Whaling Convention Amendments Act of 2018*. This legislation is critically important to our communities as a safeguard for our food and cultural security in the event the International Whaling Commission (IWC) fails to renew our harvest quota at its September 2018 meeting or thereafter.

As you know, the bowhead whale is the center of our Inupiat and Siberian Yupik culture and a critical food resource in our remote arctic communities. Since 1977, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) has exercised regulatory control over our harvest. We have adapted to this circumstance, establishing the AEWC and entering into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Commerce/NOAA. Through the NOAA-AEWC Cooperative Agreement, the AEWC has exercised local management authority over our harvest since 1980, under U.S. and IWC regulatory oversight.

Despite the clear health of the Western Arctic bowhead whale stock from which we harvest, and the great success of our bowhead whale subsistence management and conservation program, our right to harvest our whales is continuously in doubt. The AEWC's management success, combined with the North Slope Borough's state-of-the-art research on bowhead whale biology, regularly receive extensive praise at the IWC. Yet these efforts and the very significant investment of resources from our small community to support them cannot guarantee the renewal of our IWC-authorized bowhead whale subsistence quota when it expires, as it is designed to do on a regular basis.

The IWC sets our subsistence harvest quota in multi-year "blocks," which now run for six-year intervals. At the end of each block, our right to take this nutritionally and culturally vital resource expires and we must beseech members of the IWC for its renewal. When this expiration and renewal process was originally created by the IWC, there was legitimate concern

about the health of some of the worlds whale stocks. Although poor research techniques led to significantly inaccurate conclusions regarding the health of the Western Arctic bowhead whale stock in the 1970s, today there is no doubt that the stock is healthy and growing at a robust rate.

Nonetheless, our right to our subsistence harvest continues to expire. And each time it does, our quota becomes a chit in a game of politics that plays out repeatedly at the IWC over issues that have nothing to do with us or with bowhead whales. During these meetings, our quota is significant only for the fact that it can be used in others' efforts to manipulate the position of the U.S. on various matters.

It is time for the U.S. and for our representatives in Congress to put an end to this cruel political manipulation of our legal access to this vital resource. As the Whaling Convention Act currently stands, our right to harvest the whale can be taken from us without recourse in law. All that is required is that the IWC close a meeting without acting to renew our quota. This is not a remote possibility. It was done to us in 2002. We were threatened in 2007. The IWC again did it to Greenland, refusing to renew their subsistence quotas in 2012 and not acting to renew them until 2014.

The AEWC has not asked the IWC for an increase in our harvest level since 1997. In the 21 years since the current harvest level was first established, it has expired four times and will expire again at the end of this year. During this period, the estimated size of the bowhead whale population has tripled. Yet our quota is set to expire again and if the IWC's political conflicts cause the upcoming meeting to close without its renewal, again we will lose the right to take our food without recourse at law.

On behalf of my fellow whaling captains, myself, and all who depend on us for food, I hope that our Congress can act to end this abusive cycle at the IWC, that over decades has institutionalized the political manipulation of our right to take our nutritionally and culturally vital bowhead whales.

Thank you, again, for your support and your efforts on our behalf.

Sincerely,



John Hopson, Jr.
Chairman

cc: AEWC Commissioners
Mayor Harry Brower, North Slope Borough
Senator Lisa Murkowski
Congressman Don Young