

SC/68B/ASW/05

Aboriginal subsistence whaling in the
Russian Federation during 2019

Kirill A. Zharikov, Dennis I. Litovka, Egor V.
Vereshagin



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

ABORIGINAL SUBSISTENCE WHALING IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION DURING 2019

*Kirill A. Zharikov*¹, ***Dennis I. Litovka***², *Egor V. Vereshagin*^{3,4}

¹ – Russian Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography (VNIRO), Moscow, RUSSIA

² – The Office of Governor & Government of Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, Str. Bering 20, Anadyr, RUSSIA

³ – Chukotka Regional Committee of Natural Resources and Environment, Str. Otke 26, Anadyr, RUSSIA

⁴ – Association of Indigenous Peoples of Chukotka, Str. Mira 9, Anadyr, RUSSIA

In 2019-2025 the International Whaling Commission (IWC) allocated a block-quota for the aboriginal subsistence whaling, exclusively to meet traditional needs and ensure food security of the indigenous people of Chukotka. A total of 945 Gray and 49 Greenland whales supposed to be taken in Russian waters in a 7-year period with a limit of 135 gray and 7 bowhead whales' strikes annually.

The Association of Indigenous Peoples of Chukotka (AIPC) distributed the Russian part of blocked quota among local whaling communities. In 2019 sixteen local communities were involved in whaling. Subsistence harvest was supervised by the Chukotka Special Marine Inspection, the Chukotka Office of Rosprirodnadzor, the Chukotka Agricultural and Food Supply Department and the AIPC.

During the 2019 hunting season 135 gray whales were harvested. The majority of whales (44%) were taken by the indigenous hunters of the Lorino village. All gray whales (66 males and 69 females) were landed, only two gray whales were lost with harpoons due to the outbreaks in a storm. Three “stinky” gray whales were also harvested; their meat, mantak, intestines and carcasses were annihilated.

A single bowhead whale 18.9 meters female was harpooned and landed by Lorino whalers from the allocated and distributed 5 individuals' quota. TTD was 35 min.

Harpoons, darting guns and rifles (mostly 7.62 mm caliber) were used during hunt. About 1/4 of whales demonstrated aggressive behavior. Mean numbers of harpoons and darting guns spent for each whale hunt were the same as in 2016-2018 seasons: 9 harpoons, 3 darting guns and 62 bullets. TTD varied between 2 to 150 min with a median value of 22 min (in 2016-2018 about 26 min), maximum of which increased due to severe weather conditions in 2019 whaling season and also due to increasing of whales' mean size in the harvest. The furthest whale towing distance to coast was 35 km, and the closest was 0.5 km.

Ice coverage of Chukchi Sea and adjacent waters in summer 2019 stayed within average multiannual level. The minimal amount of ice was observed in August, ice density varied within 4~8% with vast areas of ice density lower than 1% or ice-free. Intensive freezing in pelagic areas of Chukchi Sea started in mid-October, final ice coverage started to establish in middle December.

Mean body length of harvested in Chukotka gray whales was 10.0 m with mean body weight 10.3 tons (in 2018 - 9.7 m and 9.3 tons). The largest whale (female 14.4 m and 31.7 tons) had been taken in Enurmino village. The smallest length (7.5 m and 5.6 tons) had female, taken

near Novoye Chaplino village and it was not accompanied by large whale and there were no signs of milk in its stomach. None of taken females was lactating; one female had fetus; 8 of landed whales had various injuries and traumas mainly caused by killer whale attacks. Mean blubber thickness was 120 mm in gray whales. In general the parameters of sightings of gray whales in Chukotka waters, as well as the body index and the stomach fullness of harvested gray whales were within average levels.

All whaling products were registered in appropriate logbooks and used for local subsistence purposes only.

Scientific supervision of aboriginal whaling had been performed by ChukotNIO from Anadyr and Chukotka Governor Office scientists. All aboriginal whaling data were presented to the Chukotka Agricultural and Food Supply Department and the AIPC.

Summarizing results of 2019 whaling season, a total biomass of 1490 tons had been acquired. Therefore, about 744 tons of Gray and Bowhead whales' products were available for consumption to Chukotka Natives, while total demand is estimated at about 1400 tons of marine mammal products at least. Average outcome from walrus and seals hunt gives about 600-800 tons, so 2019 outcome was very close to cover the demand, especially knowing that the Native population of coastal villages is constantly increasing.

In Chukotka an average rate of traditional products includes up to 50% of whale meat and blubber and is overall 60-80%, while "western" food takes only 20-40% in diet. Besides, not only coastal communities consume whale products, but 5-40% of meat and blubber exchanged to reindeer meat and other inland traditional food with reindeer herders. Sledge, hunting and cargo dogs are also fed with whale remains, which in average take more than 10% of total whaling production.

The existing ASW quota for the period 2019-2025 with the annual extraction of 135 Gray and 7 Bowhead whales is very close to estimated volume or "ideal" support level, which will allow the indigenous people of Chukotka not to feel the extreme need to provide themselves and their relatives with traditional food and for other subsistence and cultural needs preserving their and our heritage.