



Virtual Special Meeting of the Commission, 8-10 September 2021

Agenda item 3.2.6

Report from the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-Committee

Background

Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW) is conducted by four member countries: Denmark (Greenland), Russian Federation (Chukotka), St Vincent and the Grenadines (Bequia), and the United States (Alaska Natives and potentially the Makah Tribe of Washington State). The IWC has a role in conducting the science and stewardship of ASW hunts, recognizing the potential impact of this important work on traditional culture. The objective of ASW management is to ensure that hunted whale populations are maintained at (or brought back to) healthy levels while enabling native people to hunt whales at levels that satisfy cultural and nutritional requirements in perpetuity.

Catch Limits

ASW catch limits are set in multiple-year blocks, usually of six years. The current quotas were agreed to at IWC67 in September 2018 and set a one-off quota of seven years. This additional year was added to create a one year 'buffer' period between setting and implementation of all future quota blocks. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the IWC meeting schedule, but this does not impact the ASW quota schedule because the Commission is not due to review quotas until 2024 (to be implemented in 2025).

The Commission considers information from the Scientific Committee regarding the sustainability of proposed hunts and safe catch limits, and information from the governments representing each hunting community on the needs of their indigenous people. At IWC67, a number of new initiatives were endorsed in order to facilitate a more straight-forward process for considering catch limits into the future. These include a new timeline for sharing information and receiving feedback, and an agreement on an automatic renewal of catch limits under specific conditions. Renewal of the catch limits will be next considered at the 2024 meeting of the Commission.

Review of Indigenous rights

At IWC67, the Commission endorsed the ASW Sub-committee's recommendation for the Secretariat to undertake a survey of indigenous and human rights instruments, develop its Terms of Reference, and call for a tender in consultation with experts from the Maniitsoq workshop. This process began in 2018 but is being relaunched to incorporate the important step of expert and ASW country consultation. The Secretariat has undertaken the process of developing the Terms of Reference and the call for tender, working in consultation with ASW

countries, experts and attendees from the Maniitsoq and Utquiagvik workshops, and other identified experts. Once there are agreed drafts of the Terms of Reference and the call for tender, they will be reviewed by the ASW sub-committee who will then provide its advice to the full Commission at IWC68 in October 2022. If the Commission endorses moving forward with the survey, the call for tender will be published immediately after the Commission meeting.

Collaboration with ASW communities responding to entanglements

The IWC Secretariat has been in contact with the ASW community in Arctic Alaska to help facilitate removal of ghost gear from important Bowhead whale habitat. This is in response to the increased sightings by ASW hunters of cetaceans entangled in and/or trailing ghost fishing gear, which has the potential to impact the populations upon which these communities depend for subsistence harvest. The IWC Scientific Committee endorsed the recommendations from the 2019 Marine Debris Workshop to investigate ghost gear removal (Recommendation SC19208). The proposed gear removal project in Alaska would be led by the local community, could include expertise from USA (NOAA) and Norway, and potentially expand to the Sea of Okhotsk ASW community. The initial phase would be supported through the ASW voluntary fund. At a recent meeting of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, it was suggested that this work could be done in collaboration with the Arctic Council.