

SC/66b/BRG/22

Aboriginal subsistence whaling in the Russian Federation in 2015

V. Ilyashenko and K. Zharikov



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

ABORIGINAL SUBSISTENCE WHALING IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN 2015

V. Ilyashenko¹, K. Zharikov²

¹A.N.Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution (Russian Academy of Science)

²Russian Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography (VNIRO) (Federal Fisheries Agency)
e-mail: valpero53@gmail.com, zharikovkir@gmail.com

IWC allocated blocked quota for subsistence whaling including needs of Chukotka indigenous hunters in 2013-2018. The total of 720 gray and 30 bowhead whales supposed to be taken in Russian waters in a 6-year period with a limit of 135 gray and 7 bowhead whales' strikes annually.

The Fisheries Council of the Administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region distributed the Russian part of blocked quota among local whaling communities. 15 local communities were involved in whaling in 2015. Subsistence harvest was supervised by Department of Industrial and Agricultural Policy of the Administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region.

A total of 125 gray whales were struck in 2015, while no bowhead whales were taken during the hunting season. Most of the whales (56) were struck by indigenous hunters of Lorino settlement. 124 gray whales (49 males and 75 females) were landed, 1 whale was struck but lost, one of taken whales was stinky (inedible).

Harpoons, darting guns and rifles (7,62 mm calibre) were used during hunt. About 47% of whales demonstrated aggressive behavior. Mean numbers of harpoons and darting guns spent for each whale were approximately same as in 2014 season while total and mean numbers of cartridges were slightly smaller. Mean TTD varied between 14 min and 73 min in local communities with an overall median value of 23 min. The furthest whale towing distance to coast was 35 km, while the closest was 0.4 km.

Ice coverage of Chukchi Sea and adjacent waters in summer 2015 was average in multiannual trend, ice density was not high. The minimal amount of ice was observed in August. Due to period of warming in autumn the freezing of Chukchi Sea was delayed to early December, so, last whale was taken in late November.

Body length of whales, taken in Chukotka waters in 2015 varied between 8 and 13.6 meters, with an average of 9.8 m. Body weights of those whales were between 6 and 26.8 tons with mean weight of 10.5 tons. The largest whale (female, 13.6 m, and 32.4 tons) had been taken in Inchoun settlement of Chukotsky district. Among whales taken there was 1 female with fetus, none of taken females was lactating. 12 of landed whales had various injuries and traumas mainly caused by killer whale attacks. In 55 cases sampling of tissues was performed.

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

Scientific supervision of aboriginal whaling had been performed by TINRO-Center (Vladivostok) and ChukotTINRO (Anadyr) scientists. All aboriginal whaling data were presented by Department of Industrial and Agricultural policy of the Administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region.

Summarizing results of 2015 whaling season, a total biomass of about 1300 tons had been acquired. Approximate average rate of main edible products (blubber and meat) to whole body weight of gray whale is about 50%. Therefore, real amount of consumed food was about 650 tons. According to last population census in Chukotka in 2010, a total of about 14.000 people were registered in traditional local whaling coastal communities. It means that personal annual consumption of whale products in 2015 closed to 46 kg per year (126 g per day). Considering the adequate yearly personal consumption of meat in this region of Russia about 100 kg at least, it could be stated that current catch quota is not enough to meet the need of indigenous people of Chukotka in whaling products.