

SC/67B/AWMP/22

Aboriginal subsistence whaling in the Russian Federation in 2017

Zharikov, K.



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

ABORIGINAL SUBSISTENCE WHALING IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN 2017

K. Zharikov

Russian Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography (VNIRO) (Federal Fisheries Agency)
e-mail: 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 Administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region distributed the Russian part of blocked quota among local whaling communities. 14 local communities were involved in whaling in 2017. Subsistence harvest was supervised by Department of Industrial and Agricultural Policy of the Administration of Chukotka Autonomous Region.

A total of 119 gray whales and 1 bowhead whale were struck in 2017 during the hunting season. Most of whales (52) were struck by indigenous hunters of Lorino settlement. All gray whales (37 males and 82 females) and bowhead whale (female) were landed, no whales were struck but lost, and no stinky (inedible) gray whales were taken.

Harpoons, darting guns and rifles (7.62 mm calibre) were used during hunt. About 29% of gray whales demonstrated aggressive behavior. Mean numbers of harpoons and darting guns spent for each whale were same as in 2016 season while number of cartridges was higher. TTD varied between 5 min and 185 min with a median value of 20 min (same in 2016). The furthest whale towing distance to coast was 30 km, and the closest was 1 km.

Ice coverage of Chukchi Sea and adjacent waters in summer 2017 stayed within average multiannual level and was not high. The minimal amount of ice was observed in August, ice density varied between 4% and 6% with vast areas of ice density lower than 1% or no ice at all. Intensive freezing in pelagic areas of Chukchi Sea started in mid-October, final ice coverage established in early December.

Mean body length of gray whales, taken in Chukotka waters in 2017 was 9.4 m with mean body weight of those whales 9.3 tons. The largest whale (female, 14.9 m, and 35.3 tons) had been taken in Enurmino settlement of Chukotsky district. The smallest whale (female, 7.0 m and 5.2 tons) taken near Novoye Chaplino settlement was not accompanied by larger whale and there were no signs of milk in its stomach. None of taken females was lactating. Fetuses were found in 7 females, their body parameters were not registered. 10 of landed whales had various injuries and traumas mainly caused by killer whale attacks. Mean blubber thickness was 111 mm in gray whales. In 63 cases sampling of tissues was performed.

Female bowhead whale was taken near Lorino settlement of Chukotsky district. It was 17 m length and weighted 73,5 tons.

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 2017 whaling season, a total biomass of about 1103 tons had been acquired. Therefore, about 551 tons of whale products were available for consumption of indigenous people of Chukotka, while total demand is estimated at about 1400 tons of marine mammal products at least. The population of coastal settlements tends to increase. Average rate of traditional products includes up to 50% of whale meat and blubber and is overall 60-80% while "external" 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. Dogs are also feed with whale remains and as average take about 10% of total whaling production. It is a part of demand because dogs are important component of traditional lifestyle – they are used for hunting and transportation.

A total of 615 gray whales have been taken in 2013-2017. Therefore only 105 whales are left for 2018 if not to overrun the quota. Average annual take in recent years is 123 whales that mean that harvest of 105 whales will be highly insufficient for subsistence needs. The SLA trials performed in 2017 confirmed that a take up to 136 whales per year by indigenous people of Chukotka will not harm the population. As a conclusion, possible overrun of 2013-2018-year quota by Chukotka native whalers should not be considered as infraction, it reflects scientifically based sustainable catch level and such needs should be taken into account for nearest future.