

# Committee on Resources

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Verbal testimony of Charles Johnson, Alaska Nanuuq Commission, on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples Council on Marine Mammals (IPCoMM) on the reauthorization of the Marine Mammal Protection Act to the US House Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries of the House Resources Committee.

Washington, D.C. 26 July, 2003

Mr. Chairman, I am Tomungnique, Executive Director of the Alaska Nanuuq Commission, which represents the polar bear villages in Alaska on matters concerning the conservation of nanuuq, the polar bear. I am also representing the Indigenous Peoples Council on Marine Mammals or IPCoMM.

IPCoMM, the Indigenous Peoples Council on Marine Mammals, was formed in 1994 to fight for co-management of marine mammals which coastal native people of Alaska heavily depend on for subsistence. IPCoMM also serves as a sub-committee of the Alaska Federation of Natives. Our dependence on marine mammals is more than for food and the making of handicrafts handicrafts, it is cultural, spiritual and essential to our well being. In 1994 we sometimes had an adversarial relationship with the management agencies. That has changed into a cooperative relationship as we have learned to trust each other. IPCoMM represents most if not all of the Alaska Native marine mammal subsistence commissions.

During the last two plus years IPCoMM has worked diligently with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Marine Mammal Commission to develop mutually agreeable language that meets all of our needs for the reauthorization of the MMPA. This language is contained in the Administration bill that we strongly support. The key points that we have worked on will allow us to work with the agencies to develop regulations that allow management before depletion and methods for enforcement of these regulations. Alaska Natives want our descendents until at least the seventh generation to enjoy the use of marine mammals as we have. The Native community in Alaska has expressed its strong support for the harvest management provisions of the Administration's bill, as reflected in the 2002 AFN Resolution attached to my testimony.

The language in the Administration bill also recognizes the political reality that Alaska Natives live in, but at the same time contains disclaimer language that is intended to neither add to, or take away from or change that political situation. We have developed efficient state wide organizations for the co-management of marine mammals for subsistence purposes. We recognize that single village agreements for co-management is unrealistic and have developed on our own these broad representative commissions.

From the Alaska Nanuuq Commission perspective we would like to see a reorganization of management of those species that Alaska Natives use for subsistence purposes. It makes no sense for seals to be in NMFS when polar bears are in Fish and Wildlife Service. NMFS has stated that co-management is not one of their priorities because they are constantly dealing with crises'. Seals, in particular ice seals, which make up 90-95% of polar bear diets have little or no interaction with commercial fisheries. We feel it makes ecological sense for management of seals used for subsistence to be under Fish and Wildlife, where co-management would be efficient. At a meeting on July 10, 03, IPCoMM voted to also seek this move of seal management.

Additionally it has been very difficult to obtain a permit from NMFS to collect samples from harvested animals. The Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission has been seeking a permit for several years and is now collecting samples under the University of Alaska permit. Obtaining a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is as simple as getting a letter.

Alaska Natives have also developed a trust with the major environmental organizations who support our efforts to conserve our marine resources for future generations. The progress we have made in working with them and the management agencies is reflected in the language regarding harvest management in the Administration bill.

However the Administration bill took out the provisions allowing Alaska Natives to culturally exchange marine mammal products with Native peoples of Canada, Greenland and Russia as we have traditionally. Also taken out was the provision that allows Alaska Natives and Natives of Canada, Greenland and Russia

to take in and out of Alaska our traditional clothing made of marine mammal products, We urge you to put back in these provisions.

Also missing is the ban on the use of aircraft while hunting and a ban on the sale of ball bladders. We feel that these prohibitions are necessary for the conservation of marine mammals.

We urge you to consider our efforts while you contemplate reauthorization of MMPA. THANK YOU and I will answer any questions.