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Whaling Commission Updates Aboriginal Subsistence Catch Limits

Today, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) renewed aboriginal subsistence whaling catch limits through 2018 for bowhead and gray whales. The IWC last renewed these catch limits in 2007. The Commission approved catch limits at the same annual levels as previous years.

“We are extremely pleased with this action by the IWC,” said Doug DeMaster the Acting U.S. Commissioner for the IWC. “Subsistence hunting continues to be important to the way of life for our aboriginal people, and the U.S. is pleased that the IWC has recognized this importance.”

The United States requested a renewal of the bowhead whale catch limits on behalf of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, and a renewal of the gray whale catch limits on behalf of the Makah Tribe of Washington State.

Alaska Native coastal communities harvest bowhead whales for subsistence purposes. The Makah Tribe of Washington State has hunted gray whales in prior years, but currently seeks authorization from NOAA Fisheries under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to hunt gray whales for subsistence purposes.

Aboriginal subsistence whaling is based on the nutritional and cultural needs of Native communities, as well as on IWC Scientific Committee advice that the hunts are sustainable.

“The United States’ request for updated bowhead and gray whale catch limits was based on the needs of our Native communities and IWC scientific advice that these hunts would be sustainable,” said Russell Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries for NOAA, at the IWC meeting. “The United States is committed to ensuring that the subsistence needs of our aboriginal people can be met, and that all hunts occur in a manner that is consistent with the advice of the IWC Scientific Committee.”

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