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Representatives of the Interior Department, other, U.S. agencies, and Alaskan Eskimos met last weekend and reached an understanding on the identification and counting of endangered bowhead whales in an effort to avoid exceeding the Eskimo quota for this year.

The International Whaling Commission last year fixed a quota of 12 bowheads landed, or 18 struck, whichever occurs first. Within the overall quota the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission allocated small quotas for each of the Arctic villages which traditionally rely on the rare whales as a source of food and to perpetuate their ancient culture.

During the past week there have been reports from official sources that one village exceeded its sub-quota. Eskimos contended that some of the landings consisted of another subspecies of right whales, of which bowheads are one group.

Interior officials said this week that following the meeting, Eskimo villages had withdrawn most or all of their whaling crews from the Arctic icepack, now undergoing its spring breakup. To date, nine whales have been reported taken by the Eskimos overall.

Last Friday, Interior cautioned the Eskimos about possible quota violations in a message signed by Under Secretary James A. Joseph. It was addressed to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and to Eben Hopson, mayor of Alaska's North Slope Borough. The text follows:

"I am concerned about reports that some of the Eskimo whaling villages are continuing to hunt bowhead whales when they have already reached and surpassed their quota. These quotas were set by the AEWC and incorporated into U.S. law to comply with the decision of the International Whaling Commission.

"The Department of the Interior provided strong support for the Eskimo positions on whaling and self-enforcement of quotas and regulations set by the AEWC. If the reports of whaling in violation of U.S. law and the AEWC regulations are true, I strongly urge the Eskimos to take firm actions now to implement their self-enforcement measures to stop any whaling which violates the village quotas.

"I clearly understand the feelings of the Eskimos who have hunted the bowhead as an integral part of their culture for centuries. Throughout the United States struggle on this issue I have maintained that both the Eskimo culture and the bowhead whale must be protected. In doing so I have considered the ramifications of my position from the international level down to the whaling villages, and have been particularly mindful of our special responsibilities to Alaska Natives. Neither the scientists nor this Department, nor the AEWC until this time, have made the subtle distinction of type of whale within the basic species to which the bowhead belongs, and a justification of continued whaling based upon such a fine distinction raises a question of the sincerity and straightforwardness of Eskimo representations in our effort to obtain adequate hunting provisions this year.

"The United States through the National Marine Fisheries Service is now conducting several scientific

studies to determine how many bowhead whales exist. The United States intends to use this information, and information from this Department's cultural/ nutritional study to try to obtain a more adequate provision for the hunting of bowheads by Eskimos. For this to succeed it is essential that regulation and research on bowheads continue in cooperation between the United States Agencies and the Eskimos.

"The Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission agreed in March to abide by the quota, on a village-by-village basis. This is an excellent opportunity for Eskimos to prove their ability to self-enforce, and I call upon the Eskimos to act under the AEWC regulatory scheme to continue to respect that quota."