Delegates to fight for Alaska Native subsistence whaling quota at International Whaling Commission meeting in Cambridge, England

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WASHINGTON - Interior Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb today affirmed his support for efforts by Alaska Natives to preserve their traditional bowhead whaling activity. McCaleb met today with members of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission's (AEWC) on the eve of the delegation's journey to Cambridge, England, where they will defend the whaling rights of their people before the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

McCaleb worked to secure a federal grant of $107,000 to help the AEWC travel to the IWC meeting and prepare biological research in support of their case. Prior action by the international organization stripped Alaska Natives of their traditional subsistence bowhead whaling quota but the upcoming meeting in Cambridge will give AEWC delegates an opportunity to reverse the decision.

"There has been a seriously misguided, international drumbeat in recent years to strip Alaska Native families of their subsistence whaling rights and I am truly pleased that the AEWC now has the resources it needs to fight back," McCaleb said today. "There really isn't a moment to lose. The prior failure of the IWC to renew the Alaska Native bowhead quota must be reversed to protect subsistence whaling in the spring of 2003."

McCaleb met today with AEWC executive director Maggie Ahmaogak, commission vice chairman Edward Itta, Barrow Whaling Captains Association president C. Eugene Brower and North Slope Borough mayor George Ahmaogak, Sr.. McCaleb says he expects the delegation to make its case when the world whaling conference convenes on October 14th.

"At least Alaska Natives have a seat at the table and will have the scientific documentation they need to make their case for maintaining the bowhead whaling quota," McCaleb said. "I believe they have a good chance of success at Cambridge."

McCaleb unveiled the $107,000 federal grant to the AEWC during a personal tour of Barrow, Alaska in August. He said the grant clearly demonstrates the intention of the U.S. Department of Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to stand with Alaska Natives in support of subsistence whaling.