



Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission
Regarding the Kaktovik Whale

On September 13, 2015, a 42' 1" (12.8 m) male bowhead whale was harvested by the village of Kaktovik, Alaska. During processing several abscesses in the chest cavity were noted in addition to a projectile lodged about 7 feet forward of the tail. Given observations by the hunters what the whale was not healthy, concerns over food quality and safety were raised by elders and the community at large. Therefore, the community agreed that the whale would not be eaten.

“Bowhead health and food safety assessment is a critical part of Inupiaq subsistence whaling activities,” said Harry Brower, Jr., Chairman of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission. “From an Inupiaq perspective, health assessment of bowhead whales starts with the actual hunt and continues through food processing, preservation, and storage. The expertise and knowledge of whaling captains, whaling captains’ wives, and the community have been essential to determining animal health based on traditional ecological knowledge.”

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The projectile wound appeared to be old and photos of the projectile have been sent to the New Bedford Whaling Museum in New Bedford Mass for inspection. They will match it with their whalecraft collection to identify its manufacture type and estimate production year. However, initial inspection suggests the projectile may be the type used within the last 50 years.

Samples of normal and abnormal tissues collected during processing were sent to the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management (DWM) for further evaluation. The DWM has a long-standing bowhead health assessment program in place. Over the years, several hundred bowhead whales have been examined by veterinarians, biologists and hunters, and while disease conditions are considered very rare in bowheads, a few cases have been documented.

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