

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
5<sup>TH</sup> COUNCIL, 29<sup>TH</sup> SESSION

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 10-29

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## NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 10  
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### BOWHEAD WHALING - WESTERN ARCTIC

At the November session, 1964, Council requested the Administration to study the requirements for carrying out an experimental hunt of bowhead whales in the vicinity of Herschel Island. The following material is provided in response to this request.

#### GENERAL

Although Bowhead whales are protected by international agreement, Eskimos are allowed to hunt whales for subsistence. Eskimos in the western Arctic do not own suitable vessels or equipment to hunt big whales. The Department of Northern Affairs would have to provide the essential equipment, a vessel and a vessel operator. Since the Department is involved, the first requirement is approval of the Department of Fisheries to hunt a whale or whales.

Eskimo whalers in Alaska hunt whales in narrow open water leads along the land-fast floe edge. During April and May the whales migrate along the Alaskan coast to the Beaufort sea and the Alaskan hunter is thus able to predict where and when whales will appear. When they do appear the hunter is able to attack and kill a whale from the stable platform of the floe edge. Alaskan hunters use shoulder dart guns to kill whales. The shoulder gun shoots a bomb into the mammal which, if properly aimed, kills instantly. Hunters also use light paddle-propelled skin boats in the hunt. After the kill, the whale, which usually floats when dead, is brought to the edge of the land-fast ice and hauled on to the solid ice by sealskin ropes run through holes in the ice. After the whale is butchered the meat and blubber are hauled to the community. Natural refrigeration preserves the products during the period between butchering and storage.

Whale hunting from the floe edge is not possible in the western Arctic of Canada. For the most part, the floe edge is some twenty to thirty miles off-shore, and in the vicinity of Tuktoyaktuk the break-up of sea ice in spring is hastened by the warm waters of the Mackenzie River.

Whaling at sea requires considerably more equipment, not only for catching but also to preserve the meat. Whaling at sea in the Canadian western Arctic must be conducted during July or August. A delay of 48 hours before the whale is processed in those summer months means spoilage starts and such a delay is to be expected when whaling well offshore.

#### Requirements:

The vessel required must have a minimum length of 40' with at least 100 horsepower. It must be capable of steaming at 9 knots and be quick and manoeuvrable. Fuel capacity must be at least 200 gallons, which will provide a safety factor for 48 hours continuous operation.

An operator for the vessel, and a crew of three men are required.

Harpoon lines, dart guns, bombs, harpoons, blubber spades and other supplies for the vessel would cost about \$1,000.

Method:

On a properly equipped whaling vessel provision is made for the vessel to remain fast to the whale after it has been harpooned. The vessel is equipped with a power winch and, after the strike, the harpoon line is fastened to the winch cable. The winch cable runs from the winch to a loose block on the mast (this loose block is connected by a tackle to a fixed block higher up the mast and the tackle leading through it is fastened to heavy springs in the hold). From the loose block the cable is led through a fixed block at deck level and then through a sheave over the bow. The vessel is thus able to stay with the whale while the winch tackle, through the system of blocks, is able to play the whale until it is exhausted and killed or until the explosion of the first shot takes effect.

None of the vessels in the Delta are equipped with a power winch; therefore, this system cannot be applied. It is suggested that a whale should be harpooned from the deck of a vessel but immediately after a strike the forty fathom harpoon line should be made fast to another line to which are attached several 45 gallon drums. The vessel should not retain the end of the line on board but should let the line go free and thus be in a position to take evasive action if the whale is wounded and belligerent, or to move in for another shot if the whale is in its death struggles. In a small vessel no chances should be taken of fouling a line around the propeller or rudder and once a strike is made the steel drums should slow and tire the whale until it bleeds to death. A small vessel should not remain fast to a wounded or dying whale. After the kill the animal should be towed to shore and butchered as soon as possible.

Proposed Program

The Northern Administration Branch has made application to the Department of Fisheries for a permit to take one whale. If this is granted the Branch will carry out the program indicated above, this summer, with Eskimo participants, as an experiment to determine the feasibility of bowhead whale hunting in Canadian waters, the problems of preservation and the degree of utilization that might be expected. A paper reporting on the program will be presented at the first session in 1966.

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**RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL INDEX**

- 1-29            **Financing of School Districts in the Northwest Territories**
- 2-29            **Archives Building in the Northwest Territories Yellowknife Museum Society**
- 3-29            **Alcohol Education Programme**
- 4-29            **(Withdrawn)**
- 5-29            **School for Retarded Children - Yellowknife**
- 6-29            **Centennial Projects in the Northwest Territories**
- 7-29            **Centennial Project Location of the Proposed Territorial Library**
- 8-29            **Proposed Amendments to the Liquor Ordinance**
- 9-29            **Games in Licensed Premises**
- 10-29           **Availability of Overproof Rum**