

FACT SHEET  
ON  
THE TAKING OF BOWHEAD WHALES  
AND THE USE OF BOWHEAD WHALE PARTS  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Who can take bowhead whales?

A: Only Alaskan Eskimos who are registered members of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission may take (including hunt) bowhead whales.

Federal law prohibits any taking or importation of marine mammals (including bowhead whales) and marine mammal products (including bowhead whale products). However, there is an explicit exception to the prohibition on taking marine mammals for “any Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo who resides in Alaska and who dwells on the coast of the North Pacific Ocean or the Arctic Ocean.” See Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Section 101(a) and (b) (16USC1371(a), (b)).

Under the U.S. Whaling Convention Act and the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, bowhead whales may be taken (including hunted) only by Alaskan Eskimo whaling captains and their Native crews, and then only if they are members of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission.

Q: Who can use raw bowhead whale parts to make handicrafts?

A: Only Native Alaskans can use raw bowhead whale parts to make handicrafts.

Under the Native exception, only Indians, Aleuts, or Eskimos may use raw marine mammal parts to make and sell traditional handicrafts or clothing, and then only if the handicrafts are made using traditional methods. Native handicrafters may not use “pantographs, multiple carvers, or other mass copying devices.”

Q: What happens if a non-Native takes a marine mammal or uses raw marine mammal parts to make handicrafts?

A: Any non-Native who is found to have taken a marine mammal or made use of raw marine mammal parts without specific authorization from the National Marine Fisheries Service (whales and seals) or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (polar bears and walrus), may be fined or may be put in jail.

Under the MMPA, the unauthorized taking of marine mammals (including bowhead whales) or the importation or use of marine mammal products (including bowhead whale products) is subject to criminal sanctions.

Q: Could a non-Native ever use baleen or ivory to make handicrafts?

A: A non-Native may purchase authentic Native handicrafts (including etched baleen) from Native Alaskans and use those handicraft products to remake or make other handicraft products. However, the products originally purchased must be true handicrafts. For example, a piece of baleen with a couple of lines scratched on it probably would not be considered a true handicraft, in which case both the seller and the buyer could be subject to criminal sanctions under the MMPA.