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## **Review: Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability**

By M.M.R. Freeman et al, eds.

Reviewed by [Jeff Alger](#)

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M.M.R. Freeman, L. Bogoslovskaya, R.A. Caulfield, I. Egede, I.I. Krupnik, M.G. Stevenson (eds). *Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998. 208pp. US \$24.95, paper. ISBN: 0761990631.

*Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability* examines the issues surrounding traditional whaling faced by the Inuit of the circumpolar regions of Russia, Alaska, Canada and Greenland, and is based on extensive research sponsored by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. Traditional subsistence whaling is often overlooked by agencies such as the International Whaling Commission (IWC) who are responsible for setting policy and regulating the harvest of whales.

*Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability* presents the importance of whaling from the perspective of the Inuit whose culture is, to a large degree, shaped by the hunting of whales and other marine mammals. Without the whale hunts, Inuit suffer not only from a loss of food but also from a loss of cultural tradition. The editors incorporate many quotations from Inuit regarding whaling and what it means to them:

"I would think our people would always hunt whales because it is something we do: it is part of our culture and I think culturally what you eat is very, very important. Inuit identity is important: Inuit don't get a lot of identity out of eating beef" (pg. 95).

This emphasis on the cultural link of the Inuit with whales is prevalent throughout the book. Because of the blanket bans on whaling imposed by the IWC, many Inuit communities were fearful of losing the skills needed to successfully hunt whales. The younger Inuit were faced with a future without ever eating whale meat or tasting mattak, which, up to that point, was a main part of their diet. *Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability* points out that much of the social harmony of the Inuit is directly linked to whale hunting and the sharing of the whale itself within the community. The entire community is brought closer together with a unified sense of purpose through the cooperation necessary in a successful whale hunt.

*Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability* examines the various whale management regimes and the regulations developed by each, including the commissions organized by the Inuit to help them have a stronger voice with the IWC. The editors present how these commissions, such as the Alaska Eskimo Whaling

Commission, have also facilitated the incorporation of the knowledge of experienced Inuit whaling captains with biologists such as Tom Albert of Alaska's North Slope Borough:

"We then basically designed the whole research programme around what a few very senior Eskimo hunters told us, and in particular one man, Harry Brower, Sr. We have spent about fourteen years of research and many, many millions of dollars to determine whether or not he was accurate, and he was right every time" (pg. 121).

*Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability* provides an in-depth look at the dilemma of sustaining traditional Inuit whaling in the light of public outcry over the killing of whales and other marine mammals by anyone. It is a well-researched book with comprehensive suggested readings at the end of each chapter. The extensive use of Inuit quotes makes for an enlightening look into the traditional lifestyle and culture of the coastal Inuit of the circumpolar North.

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