

Beluga whales surprise Alaska residents

by UPI

BARROW, Alaska -- A dispute has erupted between Barrow, Alaska, residents and members of the Inupiat Eskimos over a summer harvest of Beluga whales. Belugas haven't been seen in the northernmost part of Alaska since the mid-1990s but this year a large number of whales, mainly large males, were spotted swimming close to shore, The Arctic Sounder newspaper reported Monday. The Inupiat took to the beaches and harvested as many as 70 whales, sparking a debate over exactly where the whales came from and whether the harvest was too large. A local radio station hosted a program with two members of Alaska's Beluga Whale Committee and a state biologist. Whale Committee Chairman Willie Goodwin stressed there was nothing illegal about the Inupiat hunt and urged local residents to respect their culture. Marine biologist Kathy Frost, a member of the whale panel, said she didn't know whether the Belugas were being slaughtered to the point of extinction.

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