



# MYTHS v. FACTS



**MYTH:** Like elephants, walrus are poached for their ivory. **FALSE!**

**FACT:** Walrus are used in Alaska's coastal communities for food, clothing and other important materials for everyday life. Alaska Native people have depended on and responsibly sourced walrus for centuries. The entire animal is put to use. Ivory is a byproduct of this harvest and used for artistic expression and economy.

**MYTH:** Walrus populations are in danger from over hunting. **FALSE!**

**FACT:** Alaska Native people have harvested walrus to feed their families and provide important materials to their communities since time immemorial. The annual walrus harvest in Alaska Native communities represents less than 2% of the current population, according to the Eskimo Walrus Commission. Sustainable harvesting practices ensure the walrus population thrives for generations to come. The walrus harvest is an excellent example of the strong relationship between Alaska Native people and the environment on which they continue to depend for survival.

**MYTH:** Alaska Native artwork created from walrus ivory is "just" a hobby for many people. **FALSE!**

**FACT:** Alaska Native artwork has become valued worldwide and provides a window to the beautiful and unique cultures across the vast state. It takes incredible skill, patience and tedious attention to detail to carve walrus ivory into the works of art often seen for sale. Carvers use their pieces to tell stories and share the experiences and cultures of the area. When sold, these carvings provide income in communities where there are very few economic options. Art sales are the main source of income for many artists and their families, who depend on selling their work to help put food on the table.



# MYTHS v. FACTS



**MYTH: It is illegal to purchase Alaska Native artwork made with walrus ivory. FALSE (usually)!**

**FACT:** Federal law explicitly allows the sale, transport and ownership of walrus ivory products when legally produced by an Alaska Native artist. In most cases, people can purchase and transport walrus ivory art with no problem, although it is a good idea to keep the receipt. The receipt should include the name, address, and tribal affiliation of the vendor, and clear identification that the item was purchased in the United States. Some states, however, do have a “blanket ban” law on all ivory, including walrus ivory. These blanket bans are well-intended and aim to help end elephant poaching. Unfortunately, they are ill-informed and have caused severe consequences for Alaska Native communities. These laws violate the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act. While only a handful of states have enacted “blanket ban” ivory laws, consumers are encouraged to check their state laws to be sure.

**MYTH: Purchasing Alaska Native ivory artwork harms walrus populations and contributes to an unethical hunting practices. FALSE!**

**FACT:** The symbiotic relationship between Alaska Native people and the land they use for survival is based on need, respect and responsible use. According to the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the co-management organization representing 19 Alaska Native coastal communities' interests in Pacific walrus, the Pacific walrus population is estimated at 283,000. The annual walrus harvest in Alaska Native communities represents less than 2% of the current walrus population. Walrus have been responsibly and respectfully harvested for centuries by Alaska Native people who use all parts of the walrus to meet the needs of their families and communities.