

To get picture of whale, he ships parts throughout country

Whale eyeballs air freighted to Louisiana, bowhead stomachs shipped to Texas . . . is it the start of a new horror movie or some kind of Friends of the Whales medivac? Neither, it's the research project of the North Slope Borough's new Science Advisor, Dr. Thomas Albert.

Dr. Albert hopes to put together a complete picture of bowhead whale anatomy. If he is successful it would be one of the first comprehensive views of how such massive sea-going mammals are put together.

"The first step in learning how a machine works is to learn how it is put together," says Albert. And he is learn-

ing how bowheads are put together by taking them apart and sending the pieces across the country.

On the receiving end of the whale tidbits are scientists who specialize in certain parts of animal anatomy. For example, renowned animal eye experts live in Louisiana, so Louisiana is where the bowhead eyeballs are bound. Eventually, all the pieces will come back (or at least the information about them) to Albert so he can put them together for a total description of how the bowhead whale works.

Knowing more about bowhead anatomy may someday help save it from human hazards like oil spills, according

to Albert.

"We need to know if oil gets on a whale, how it will affect the whale's skin. If the whale breathes oil vapor, how it will effect its lungs. If oil gets under its eyelid, what will happen?"

Albert's effect on the Borough already has been beneficial. This fall he played an important role in dealing with oil exploration activity in the Beaufort Sea that threatened bowhead whale migrations and violated the government's agreement with the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC).

Albert's research into those activities along with A.E.W.C.

legal pressure resulted in curtailment of harmful Beaufort Sea seismic testing and led to ongoing talks with State and Federal officials concerning such tests.

Dr. Albert is no newcomer to the North Slope. He worked at the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory in Barrow for two years (1977-1978). It was during this time that he first began studying the bowhead under a Bureau of Land Management contract. He then returned for two years to the University of Maryland where he is a member of the Veterinary Science Department.

The North Slope Borough

has contracted for Albert's services through the university. The A.E.W.C. will be funding his continued bowhead whale research.

Dr. Albert's family has accompanied him during his work in Barrow. His wife, Marnie Albert, is teaching physical education at Ipalook Elementary School and their children, Tom and Helen, are attending Barrow High School. Dr. Albert says they are all happy to be back in Barrow.

Dr. Albert is a man of great credibility in the eyes of the Eskimo whaling captains for his concern for the bowhead and the Eskimo's subsistence whaling activities.