



To: The City of Manhattan Beach
From: John Warner, CEO, Marine Mammal Care Center (MMCC)
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Date: April 24, 2025

Request: In order to provide adequate public safety, timely response, and invaluable care for the variety of marine mammals – including many species of cetaceans and pinnipeds – that are stranded or in distress in Manhattan Beach – the Marine Mammal Care Center (MMCC) is seeking to formalize a public-private partnership through an annual service contract and appropriation from the city of Manhattan Beach in the amount of \$50,000.

We are submitting proposals to all Los Angeles County coastal cities to ensure a collective regional solution and annual appropriation that meets the service needs associated with a rapidly changing environment and increasing volume of marine mammal strandings.

Background: Los Angeles County has the least amount of critical shoreline habitat in all of California. This habitat, characterized by rock formations and beaches where people and buildings/encroachment are not prevalent, creates essential habitat areas for marine mammal health, giving marine mammals areas to rest, wait out storms, give birth, nurse pups, or recover when sick or injured. Without these places, sick marine mammals have no choice but to come ashore on LA County beaches that are heavily populated by people. This creates public safety and public health issues that are unique to Los Angeles County.

With increasing reports of stranded, entangled, and distressed marine animals in our community and the public more engaged and demanding of marine mammal first responder services, MMCC's work is more important than ever.

Toxic Algal Blooms: Since February 20, 2025, the Marine Mammal Care Center has been responding to a record number of live stranded sea lions and dolphins with domoic acid toxicosis caused by a toxic algal bloom off the LA County coastline.

Domoic acid is a naturally occurring neurotoxin produced by algae that accumulates in fish such as sardines and anchovies, which are then consumed by marine mammals, leading to severe neurological symptoms. This toxin can cause seizures, aggressive behavior, lethargy, dehydration, vomiting, and even death in a variety of marine animals, including sea lions, dolphins and seabirds.

While these incidents used to occur every four to seven years, the frequency of these toxic algal blooms has increased in recent years, exacerbated by climate change, warming ocean temperatures, runoff into our oceans and other human activities. This year's bloom is worse



than the one in 2023, which was the worst ever recorded until now, with animals continuing to strand in high numbers.

Significance to Manhattan Beach and Los Angeles County: The Marine Mammal Care Center is a key partner to coastal cities and all residents of Los Angeles County in the management and conservation of our marine natural resources. State, county, and local municipality law enforcement, lifeguards, harbor/marina patrols, and animal control offices work closely with our team to ensure a high level of communication, public and personnel safety and effective marine mammal response. The Center's contribution to public safety, biosurveillance, scientific research, animal welfare, population health, and public awareness and education in Los Angeles County is irreplaceable, with no other organization authorized or having the skills and expertise necessary to do this work.

The number of animals the Marine Mammal Care Center responds to and rescues each year varies, but recent trends indicate that strandings will continue to increase, with cyclical spikes occurring more frequently. Causes of strandings include toxicity from harmful algal blooms, malnutrition, infectious diseases, and entanglements, among other threats. On average, we respond to 750 – 1000 reports of marine mammals in distress and rescue and rehabilitate anywhere from 250 – 500 animals each year. Zone 2, which includes Manhattan Beach, accounts for about 45% of our total rescues each year.

Without the services provided by MMCC, tourism and access to recreation could be significantly impacted during an average year, let alone a domoic acid or other similar mass stranding event, resulting in no effective way to manage the high volume of ill or injured marine mammals on our beaches.

About MMCC: The Marine Mammal Care Center Los Angeles (MMCC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and a leader in the field of marine mammal health and conservation. MMCC is the only organization authorized by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to respond to marine mammals in distress year-round along the entire Los Angeles County coastline from Malibu to Long Beach, Catalina Island, and at sea.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COAST: AN ECOSYSTEM LIKE NO OTHER: California borders the vast Pacific Ocean, which accounts for nearly half of the world's ocean area and supports a significant portion of the planet's biodiversity. Just offshore, the California Current serves as a vital feeding ground for billions of fish, mammals and birds. These consistently cool waters contribute to the state's mild and welcoming coastal climate.

The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, situated off the coast of Southern California, is renowned for its remarkable biodiversity and stunning kelp forests. These underwater ecosystems are teeming with vibrant marine life. Twenty-seven different species of whales and dolphins visit or inhabit the Channel Islands, including the world's largest congregation of blue



whales, as well as fin, humpback, and gray whales. Common dolphins, orcas, and Risso's dolphins are also frequent visitors.

Five species of pinnipeds, including California sea lions, elephant seals and harbor seals, rely on the sanctuary for feeding and breeding. In fact, more than 80 percent of all California sea lions are born on the Channel Islands in June of every year. Additionally, 60 species of seabirds, such as the rare Scripps's murrelet and California brown pelican, nest, feed and migrate here.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY: LA County has more marine mammal rescues per mile of coastline than anywhere else in the country but also the least remaining critical shoreline habitat in all of California. This disappearing shoreline – characterized by rock formations and beaches where people and buildings or encroachment aren't prevalent – creates an essential habitat area for marine mammals, allowing them to rest, wait out storms, give birth, nurse pups, or recover when sick or injured. Without these places, sick marine mammals have no choice but to come ashore on LA County beaches that are heavily populated by people. This creates public safety and public health issues that are unique to Los Angeles County.

The county's coastline provides recreational and environmental amenities that generate over \$4 billion in international tourism to the Los Angeles area annually. Los Angeles County is also home to the busiest port complex in the United States; close to 45 percent of all oceanic freight entering the country comes ashore through the twin ports at Los Angeles and Long Beach. Together, these ports contribute more than 1 million jobs to a vibrant economy.

Conservation and commerce can and need to coexist. Marine Mammal Care Center is committed to working with our partners in Los Angeles County to make it the model for how marine wildlife can thrive in an urban ocean environment.

MISSION AND VISION: The mission of the Marine Mammal Care Center Los Angeles is to inspire ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, education, and research. Our vision is of a healthy ocean ecosystem where people and marine life thrive together.

NEED: Our ocean is in trouble. Human activity threatens marine ecosystems that have been thriving since before humans arrived. From increasing ocean temperatures and acidification to the depletion of fish stocks, our ocean, vital to all life on Earth, needs our help.

Marine mammals are ecosystem indicators, and these animals provide insights into human and ocean health threats. We are taking action today to support a network of professionals and stewards to protect our shared ocean environment for future generations.

OUR WORK: To advance our mission, we focus our work on three key program areas:

1. Rehabilitation: The Center rehabilitates sick and injured marine mammals at our hospital until they can be released back to the wild. Annually, the Center cares for 250 to 500 sea lions, elephant seals, fur seals, and harbor seals. Since 1992, we've cared for more than 10,000



marine mammals. As a partner in the NOAA Stranding Network, the Center helps grow scientific understanding of the animal populations we treat by tracking the occurrence of disease and human-related stranding events. Our experts develop treatment protocols and best practices to deliver outstanding care to animals in need and collaborate with scientists from around the country to conduct non-invasive research.

2. Rescue and Response: MMCC rescues and responds to marine mammals along the entire coast of Los Angeles County, including Catalina Island, and recent trends indicate that strandings will continue to increase, with cyclical spikes occurring more frequently. Causes of strandings include malnutrition, infectious diseases, entanglements, and toxicity from harmful algal blooms, among other threats. On average, our experts respond to 750 to 1,000 reports of marine mammals in distress each year. Additionally, in 2023, MMCC joined NOAA's National Large Whale Entanglement Response Network to help save the growing number of whales entangled in fishing gear that traverse our coastline.

3. Education and Community Engagement: MMCC's education programs provide learning opportunities for K-12 students, community organizations, conservation partners, and the public. Our programs are designed to be inquiry-driven and learner-centric, emphasizing the important role that we all play in environmental stewardship. We create experiences that motivate, inspire and equip people to take concrete actions to protect the ocean and marine mammals. The Center is also a unique training ground for veterinary and animal care professionals. Our Teaching Hospital combines hands-on practical experience, innovative medicine and meaningful professional collaboration.

Thank you again, and please let me know if there is anything else I can provide.

Yours in service,

John Warner, CEO