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For Immediate Release

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NATIONAL AQUARIUM SENDS “HASTINGS” THE HARBOR SEAL BACK TO SEA

Ocean City, May 13, 2010 – National Aquarium staff and volunteers were joined by community members on the beach in Ocean City, Maryland to help “Hastings” the harbor seal with his oceanic return! Hastings suffered severe lacerations to his front flipper, but thanks to months of rehabilitation by The National Aquarium’s Marine Animal Rescue Program (MARP), he was rescued, rehabilitated and safely released back to sea. The public can track his progress at www.aqua.org/trackhastings.html.

The juvenile male harbor seal was stranded along the Atlantic coast of Maryland, in the town of Ocean City, on January 15, 2010. MARP responded, and the seal was admitted to the National Aquarium for rehabilitation. Upon admission, the seal was underweight, severely dehydrated, mildly emaciated, and medically compromised due to a wound behind the left front flipper. In addition to the wound, he was found to have an upper respiratory infection and a mild case of pneumonia at the time of being admitted for rehab.

The seal, called Hastings, was treated with antibiotics for several weeks, and his wound was treated every three days for two weeks. Hastings responded well to treatment and was soon interacting with enrichment devices, the animal equivalent of toys, and eagerly eating. While in rehab, Hastings gained nearly 20 pounds on a daily diet of herring and capelin.

“Hastings overcame many challenges while in rehabilitation, and we have every reason to believe that he will have a successful reintroduction back into his natural environment,” says MARP stranding coordinator Jennifer Dittmar, “We strive to return these stranded animals to the ocean as soon as they are ready, and to minimize contact while they are in our care, in order to avoid them coming to associate humans with food.”

Upon release, the healthy seal weighed 71 pounds and was eating 7 lbs of fish a day. He was named Hastings by the Pettus-Crowe Foundation, a private donor who funded a satellite tracking tag for the seal. The satellite tag was affixed to his fur so Aquarium staff and researchers can learn more about seal migration and travel patterns. The public is invited to follow Hastings’ progress by viewing a satellite map of his travels at the Aquarium’s website at <http://www.aqua.org/trackhastings>. Information will be gathered until the adhesive fails and the tag falls off.

This is the 83rd animal released by the National Aquarium. Formed in 1991 and staffed almost entirely by volunteers, the Marine Animal Rescue program has responded to hundreds of strandings, including seals, dolphins and endangered sea turtles, and to sightings of manatees, dolphins and other marine mammals.

Seal release, 2

Many of MARP's patients are sick or injured due to human-related activities like boat strikes, gear entanglement or plastic ingestion. Weather, malnourishment, exhaustion and pollution also contribute to strandings. Rescuing and studying stranded animals provides vital information about the status of the ocean and coastal environments, as well as the biology and health of the animals that live in those environments.

The public is invited to help with the National Aquarium's marine animal rehabilitation efforts. **Text ACT to 20222** to make a \$5 donation. *Msg & data rates apply* or visit aqua.org.

The Mid-Atlantic coast is a popular destination for migrating seals. These are some things people can do to protect marine mammals and other aquatic animals in our area:

- Slow down – boat strikes are a frequent source of injuries for marine mammals and endangered sea turtles.
- Dispose of trash properly, particularly plastics and plastic bags. Marine animals can confuse trash with a food source or become entangled.
- Do not release balloons. Balloons can fall into bodies of water where animals confuse them for a food source or become entangled in them.
- Never dispose of fishing line or nets in the water.
- If a beachgoer spots a stranded animal they are required by law to keep their distance, and encouraged to call the Stranding Hotline at **1-800-628-9944** to report the animal to the Maryland Natural Resource Police.

About National Aquarium

The National Aquarium, a non-profit organization, is Maryland's most exciting and popular cultural attraction, as well as one of the region's leading conservation and education resources. For close to three decades, it has been a symbol of urban renewal, an economic anchor for the region and a source of pride for Marylanders. It has enjoyed strong, reliable attendance since opening on August 8, 1981. With original attendance projections of 650,000 visitors per year, the National Aquarium has welcomed an average annual attendance of 1.5 million over the past 10 years. Through transforming experiences, the National Aquarium inspires people to enjoy, respect, and protect the aquatic world. It is dedicated to education and conservation through more than a dozen programs that serve the environment and the community.

About MARP

The Marine Animal Rescue Program (MARP) is the cornerstone of the National Aquarium's ocean health initiative. Formed in 1991 and staffed almost entirely by volunteers, MARP's mission is to rescue, rehabilitate and release stranded animals back into the natural environment whenever possible; share knowledge with the scientific community; and provide public educational programs through special events and presentations. MARP has successfully rescued, treated, and returned seals, dolphins, porpoises, pilot whales, pygmy sperm whales, sea turtles, and a manatee to their natural habitats.

The National Aquarium is a member of the Northeast Region of the National Stranding Network through an agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service. MARP staff and volunteers respond to animal strandings 24 hours a day in the coastal areas of Virginia, Maryland and Delaware, and have returned more than 80 marine animals back to their natural environment.

Seal release, 3

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