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NATIONAL AQUARIUM IN BALTIMORE ORGANIZES DOLPHIN COUNT Volunteers Needed for Annual Coastal Survey

Baltimore, Md. (July 10, 2006) - The National Aquarium in Baltimore will lead Maryland's annual dolphin count on Wednesday, July 12 in an effort to determine the state's dolphin population. Volunteers are welcome to participate from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

Staff from the National Aquarium in Baltimore, volunteers from the Aquarium's Marine Animal Rescue Program, and local community volunteers will be stationed at various locations along the 26 miles of Maryland coast, searching for dolphins. As dolphins pass by, they are recorded on a tally sheet. Community volunteers allow the Aquarium to have more counting stations along the beach, providing a more accurate representation of the Maryland dolphin population.

Annual dolphin counts help scientists gather long-term information about dolphin populations, reproduction rates and ocean health. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries department monitors dolphin populations and regulations surrounding them.

"We have learned that bottlenose dolphins use Maryland waters as a thoroughfare for migration, using Maryland waters as feeding grounds," says Jose Barrios, the Aquarium's manager of ocean health. "Tracking population numbers over the years helps determine the health of the water as well as the abundance of prey."

Scientists became concerned about dolphin populations when 750 dolphins died in 1987 and 1988 along the Atlantic seaboard. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service classifies Atlantic bottlenose dolphin populations to be on the verge of threatened or endangered.

The dolphin count is part of Beyond the Boardwalk, a week-long celebration of the ocean environment in Ocean City, Md.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization, is Baltimore's leading attraction, hosting more than 1.6 million visitors per year. The Aquarium's mission is to connect people with aquatic life in order to create a better world for both. It is dedicated to education and conservation through more than a dozen programs that serve the environment and the community.

Those interested in volunteering for the dolphin count should call the Beyond the Boardwalk phone line at 410-371-9802 for locations and details.

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