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AQUARIUM AND DNR WORKING TO SAVE ENDANGERED SEA TURTLE

Turtle Found with Recreational Fishing Hook Caught in Throat

Baltimore. June 12, 2006. The National Aquarium in Baltimore and Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hopeful that a Kemp's ridley sea turtle, the most endangered sea turtle in the world, will recover successfully from emergency surgery to remove a hook embedded in the animal's throat.

The turtle was reported to DNR on Wednesday, June 7 by a local citizen as part of a mark and recapture study that the agency is conducting on sea turtles in the Chesapeake Bay. Upon examination, DNR's veterinarian Dr. Cindy Driscoll and biologist Tricia Kimmel discovered that the turtle had a prior injury – a recreational fishing hook was caught in its throat – and transported the animal to the Aquarium's Marine Animal Rescue Program (MARP) hospital facilities for treatment and rehabilitation.

Thursday, the Aquarium's veterinary staff, with the assistance of Dr. Dan Petrus of Atlantic Veterinary Internal Medicine, LLC, performed an endoscopy on the turtle to better assess its situation. The hook was successfully removed Friday. MARP staff and volunteers are providing ongoing daily care for the turtle.

“This turtle is certainly not out of the woods yet,” said Kat Hadfield, MA Vet MB MRCVS, the Aquarium's junior associate veterinarian. “The injury appears relatively recent, which will help the animal's overall chances. Our hope is that the turtle will recover and be released back into the Bay soon.”

The turtle was underweight and dehydrated at the time of rescue and had an injury to its mouth, all of which likely stemmed from the hook. The turtle is a juvenile and too young for staff to determine its sex without a blood test. Its carapace, or back shell, is about 20 inches long and the turtle weighs about 29 pounds. Before the turtle can be considered a candidate for release, it must resume normal feeding behaviors, gain weight and the wounds must heal.

Approximately ½ of all animals cared for by MARP have been injured due to human-related activities. Anyone on the water can help protect sea turtles and the Aquarium and DNR want to remind people of three things:

- Be mindful of fishing gear and the dangers of cutting lines. Animals swallow the hooks and the lines may entangle them.
- Many of the turtles rescued locally are injured by boat strikes; slower speeds save lives.
- If you spot an injured or dead marine animal, call for assistance. The Maryland Natural Resources Police Stranding Hotline is **1-800-628-9944**.

Approximately 15,000 sea turtles enter the Chesapeake Bay each summer. Kemp's ridley sea turtles are the world's most endangered sea turtle, partially because they nest on only one beach in the world, making them easy targets for poachers.

MARP and DNR's Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding Program are part of NOAA Fisheries' North East Stranding Network. On average, MARP responds to between 30 – 35 strandings each year and

has the capacity to care for numerous animals at once, while DNR investigates approximately 40 dead stranded animals annually.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, 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, 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.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the state agency responsible for providing natural and living resource-related services to citizens and visitors. DNR manages more than 446,000 acres of public lands and 17,000 miles of waterways, along with Maryland's forests, fisheries and wildlife for maximum environmental, economic and quality of life benefits. A national leader in land conservation, DNR-managed parks and natural, historic and cultural resources attract 12 million visitors annually. DNR is the lead agency in Maryland's effort to restore the Chesapeake Bay, the state's number one environmental priority. Learn more at www.dnr.Maryland.gov.

B-roll of the medical procedures is available from the Aquarium.

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