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National Aquarium in Baltimore to Release Rehabilitated Seal in Ocean City

*First Seal Ever Released on Delmarva Peninsula Will be Satellite Tracked
Public Invited to Watch Release, Scheduled for 9 a.m. March 15*

Baltimore. March 8, 2005 – The National Aquarium in Baltimore’s Marine Animal Rescue Program will release a stranded and rehabilitated harbor seal into the waters off Ocean City on Tuesday, March 15, 2005. This is the first time that a seal will be released from the Delmarva Peninsula. The seal stranded along Virginia Beach, Va. on January 3, 2005 and the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center’s stranding team responded. She was transported to Baltimore a month later to complete her rehabilitation.

The seal is under a year old and was malnourished and dehydrated when she stranded; she also had evidence of trauma to the left side of her head, neck and eye. An ophthalmologist evaluated the seal’s eye and determined that there may be some minor vision loss, but not enough to prevent successful hunting. Before the Federal government would allow her release, Aquarium staff had to be certain that the seal would be able to hunt and survive on her own. Over the past 3 weeks, she has successfully hunted live fish in her rehabilitation facilities at the Aquarium. She weighed 45 pounds when she stranded, and has nearly doubled her weight in the past ten weeks.

Just before she is released, Aquarium staff will fit her with a satellite tag that will transmit information about her behaviors, including where she goes, her hunting habits and how much time she spends out of the water. The public will also be able to monitor her whereabouts through the Aquarium’s Web site at www.aqua.org. The tag could track her movements for up to several months and will fall off when she molts, or sheds her fur.

Students at local schools and members of area scout troops are participating in a contest to name the seal. Her name, which will be used on the tracking web site, will be announced at her release.

The release will take place at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, March 15, near the Ocean City Inlet. Members of the public are invited to attend and should plan to arrive by 8:45 a.m. Parking is available at the Inlet Parking Lot.

Seals are marine mammals and are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Observers will be 50 yards away from the animal, as required by Federal law.

Harbor seals live in cool climates; New Jersey is home to the most southerly year-round population on the east coast. These seals regularly travel further south, however, and during the winter are regular visitors to the Delmarva Peninsula. Historically seals have been flown or driven to the Northeast coast for release. As more of these animals travel to the Mid-Atlantic each winter, scientists agree that releasing them in the same region where they stranded makes sense.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore's Marine Animal Rescue Program is part of the 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.

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.

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