



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Laguna Beach, CA - The tide has turned in the historic toxic domoic algae bloom that affected hundreds of California sea lions and common dolphins along the Southern California coastline.

Laguna Beach, CA [July 31, 2023] – The rescue calls started coming in to Pacific Marine Mammal Center (PMMC) in early June about sea lions and common dolphins having seizures on Southern California beaches as a result of a massive harmful algal bloom offshore. Since then, PMMC has responded 104 sea lions and 10 common dolphins, making this the largest adult sea lion stranding event to hit the marine mammal rehabilitation hospital in over 20 years.

The very sick adult sea lions required intensive care for the first couple of weeks in the hospital, and PMMC’s rescue, animal care and veterinary teams quickly became inundated with the influx of sea lions in need of help. To support their efforts, a call was put out by NOAA to stranding network partners, zoos and aquariums asking for help from zookeepers and veterinarians.

“The massive influx of adult sea lions was unprecedented for our hospital- our patient capacity and personnel were being pushed to their limits,” said Dr. Alissa Deming, Vice President of Conservation Medicine and Science at PMMC. “We could not have kept up without the people sent from zoos, aquariums, and stranding network partners who were instrumental in ensuring these very sick sea lion received the life-saving care they needed.”

Scientists from NOAA CoastWatch and the Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System monitoring the bloom said that it likely originated offshore, although new data show elevated domoic acid concentrations at Cal Ploy Pier in central California as early as mid-May. “It as a pretty major event”, said Dr. Clarissa Anderson, Director of the Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System. “This was one of the worst cases in terms of marine mammal impacts within a relatively small geographic area in the past 25 years.”

The Pacific Marine Mammal Center is grateful for the outpouring of support during this unfortunate event. CEO Glenn Gray stated that, “PMMC is very appreciative to the community, families, foundations and businesses for the generous outpouring of gifts that helped us with the enormous cost of food and medicine to treat the multitude of patients. These strandings happened at a time when we are just starting our physical expansion, and when complete, we will be able to



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accommodate more patients in the years ahead. It showed us we're on the right path and the community support has been overwhelming."

PMMC is happy to report the bloom and influx of patients is finally letting up, and they have started to release some of the sea lions that have successfully been treated for the toxic effects of domoic acid. So far, over 65% of the sea lions were saved, which would not have been possible without the support of colleagues, donors, and volunteers.

PMMC would like to thank The Marine Mammal Center (Sausalito, CA), Como Zoo (St. Paul, MN), the Vancouver Aquarium, and the National Marine Mammal Foundation for sending zoo keepers and veterinarians to support the rehabilitation efforts of these sick sea lions and dolphins.

Please support your local zoo and aquarium by visiting, volunteering, make a gift, join a membership program, being an advocate and visiting their websites to learn what you can do to make a difference.

National Marine Mammal Foundation www.nmmf.org/

The Marine Mammal Center www.MarineMammalCenter.org

The Como Zoo and Conservatory www.comozooconservatory.org

The Vancouver Aquarium www.vanaqua.org/

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For more information, please visit our website www.pacificmmc.org or contact Debra Finster, dfinster@pacificmmc.org or (949) 929-7297.