



The Marine
Mammal Center.

October 23, 2018

Mr. John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814
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RE: **Support—Item 6b2:** Support for the California Marine Mammal Stranding Network for Sea Lion and Seal Rescue and Rehabilitation

Dear Secretary Laird and Councilmembers:

I write this letter to express my support for the staff's recommended action that the Council move in favor of: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center (WHC) at the University of California Davis to support California Marine Mammal Stranding Network activities for sea lion and seal rescue and rehabilitation.

The Marine Mammal Center—a Stranding Network member—is a non-profit hospital, research and education organization that has treated more than 20,000 seals, sea lions and other marine mammals in its 43-year history. The Center's federally authorized marine mammal response operations occur over 600 miles of California's coastline from Mendocino to San Luis Obispo County as well as throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Headquartered in the Marin Headlands with triage centers in San Luis Obispo, Moss Landing and Anchor Bay, the Center operates 24 hours per day, 365 days per year with 70-plus staff, and more than 1,200 actively engaged volunteers. Our central mission of marine mammal patient care allows the achievement of two additional mission priorities: scientific research and education. Our scientific research team is an internationally recognized leader in advancing the science of marine mammal health, and by extension providing valuable insight into the health of the oceans. We believe strongly in promoting greater stewardship of the oceans and we conduct extensive education programs for school children and visiting members of the public.

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An unusual mortality event (UME) was declared by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries in 2013, based on an extraordinary number of California sea lions stranding on southern California beaches. These patients were dependent pups that were uniformly found to be extremely emaciated and of low body weight. Preliminary findings of the UME investigation suggested that a change in the availability of prey (including amount, type and location) was a likely contributor to the elevated strandings. This UME is still open. Peak stranding numbers occurred in 2015, but numbers remained high into 2016 and 2017. In addition to the dynamics that have led to this UME, stranding center personnel monitor conditions such as El Niño and other ocean water temperature anomalies, harmful algal blooms, infectious diseases, and more, all of which can impact the volume of patients coming into the system. Currently, NOAA fisheries projects a 70-75% chance of a weak El Niño during Northern Hemisphere winter 2018-19. Sustained readiness is essential for network members.

In 2015, the State of California provided \$1,000,000 through the Governor's budget to support the California Marine Mammal Stranding Network members' efforts for seal and sea lion rehabilitation. In 2016 and 2017, the state provided \$2,000,000. These funds were provided directly to the WHC at the University of California Davis for disbursement. With input from NOAA Fisheries – through which all marine mammal rehabilitation centers are authorized to do their work – the WHC created a process for calculating distribution amounts based on the provision of a base level of support to each center, along with funds allocated based on the number of patients and the number patient days on site. A similar process was put in place for those responding to those animals that had died. This process has been perceived as both appropriate and fair by the receiving institutions, and is a process that has served the state of California well these three past years.

Funds received by rehabilitation Centers, have been put to good work and have been used to ensure adequate staffing, transportation, equipment, medicine and food is available for the successful care of patients. Of equal importance, these funds have also allowed centers to develop and/or maintain a state of readiness for response, making the investment a sound one during times of crisis as well as apparent calm.

I encourage the Council to support this recommendation to ensure that funds are transferred to California Marine Mammal Stranding Network members via the WHC at the University of California Davis as it has proven to be fair, transparent and efficient.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Boehm", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jeff Boehm
Executive Director