FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Drastic Increase in Dolphin Strandings, Cause for Concern

Pacific Marine Mammal Center responds to 6 dolphin strandings in 14 days.

Laguna Beach, CA Monday, February 25, 2019 - Pacific Marine Mammal Center (PMMC) responded to six beached dolphins in 14 days. Five of the species were Common dolphins and one of them was a Bottlenose dolphin.

This influx of cetacean strandings began on February 4 when three Common dolphins beached themselves in one day. One male dolphin washed up deceased in Huntington Beach, and two other male dolphins were rescued in Laguna Beach, both alive but were humanely euthanized after further examination by PMMC's animal care and veterinary teams. On February 10, a deceased female Bottlenose dolphin washed ashore at Corona Del Mar. Five days later, another deceased female, this time a Common dolphin, washed ashore also at Corona Del Mar. Both female dolphins were pregnant. The most recent stranding was a male Common dolphin that was found in Corona Del Mar on February 18.

PMMC has performed necropsies on all of the dolphins. In addition, PMMC partners with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and NOAA-certified marine mammal diagnostic labs within academic universities across the United States to collectively collaborate and better understand why this unusual increase of beached cetaceans may have occurred. "There are a variety of potential reasons as to why these dolphins are stranding. These include, but are not limited to, viral infections, bacterial infections, and toxins. We may not always get a definitive answer, but we consider our research with these dolphins to be a very important piece to the puzzle in providing clues as to what is going on in our nearshore habitats." said Kristen Sakamaki, DVM, PMMC's Veterinarian.

According to the Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System (SCCOOS), recent harmful algae blooms have been occurring along the Southern California Coast. These blooms can produce domoic acid, a poison that is toxic for humans, marine mammals and seabirds when ingested. In addition, these stranding events can be caused or made worse by the heavy rains and storms that have doused Southern California, which results in excess nutrients and other harmful toxins from land washing out to the oceans.

Two more beached dolphins were also reported to PMMC during the same 14 day time span. One washed back out immediately and another washed up in an unsafe location for the PMMC rescue team to respond.

This outbreak of beached dolphins is very concerning. Last year, at this time, PMMC had only responded to one stranded dolphin. "This drastic and unexpected increase in cetaceans has had a significant impact on our Center. With so many incidents concentrated in such a short period of time, this has taken up much of the attention as well as our resources away from our more 'traditional' animal care operations focused on seals and sea lions, which coincidentally, we've also seen a major increase this year as compared to this same time last year. Nonetheless, we are committed to providing the best care for these animals." said Kristen Sakamaki, DVM, PMMC's Veterinarian.
understanding the root of the problem. Although absolutely heart-breaking, these stranding events will provide a tremendous amount of information that will not only contribute to important insights into the lives of dolphins, but also, it will help with the overarching science on the changes that we are seeing in our ocean waters." said Peter Chang, CEO at PMMC.

PSA* Marine mammals are wild and can carry zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted to humans and pets. Children are particularly at risk from marine mammals and should stay well clear of them. If you see a beached dolphin or marine mammal, please call PMMC at 949-494-3050 and report the animal immediately. While we understand your first instinct may be to assist the animal back out to the ocean, please do not attempt to move these animals without adequate and expert assistance. Additionally, these animals can strand as a sign of something serious that may be happening internally, and you may actually be doing more harm than good.

PMMC Team, Laguna Beach Marine Safety, and Animal Control responding to live dolphin at Fisherman's Cove, Laguna Beach.
PMMC team responding to live dolphin on Feb 4.

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**About Pacific Marine Mammal Center**

The Pacific Marine Mammal Center rescues, rehabilitates and releases marine mammals and inspires ocean stewardship through research, education and collaboration. Pacific Marine Mammal Center is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our Tax-ID number is: 95-3680896

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