FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Severely Entangled Sea Lion from Dana Point Harbor Rescued by Pacific Marine Mammal Center Gets Released Back into the Wild

*Patient case highlights major issues facing all wild marine mammals.*

**Laguna Beach, CA Tuesday May 25, 2021** - On the morning of Thursday April 15, 2021, Pacific Marine Mammal Center (PMMC) along with Orange County Sheriff’s Harbor Patrol and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) gathered together to attempt a rescue of a severely entangled sea lion that had evaded rescuers for almost 6 weeks prior. Though the injury was considered life threatening, the subadult sea lion was at a healthy body weight and was still alert, active and aware. Because of this, PMMC needed to get approval for remote dart sedation.

Remote dart sedation of wild sea lions can be difficult and comes with some risks, however that morning everything seemed to fall into place. Serendipitously, he was hauled out alone on a dock next to a boat named “Second Chance”. In a total group effort that involved five (5) boats in the water, PMMC veterinarian, Dr. Alissa Deming, was able to safely deploy the dart and deliver the sedatives necessary to rescue the entangled sea lion *(video)*.

Once the sedated sea lion was safely back on the dock, the PMMC team was able to get a closer look. The injury was worse than originally expected and given a 5% chance at survival. The gillnet entanglement had cut through his neck creating a hole that extended into his oral cavity and was also deeply embedded in his skin in other locations. His prognosis was very guarded and he was going to need multiple surgeries to fix his injuries. The center name him Loki.

Dr. Tammy Da Costa Gomez, board certified small animal surgeon and on the Board of Directors at the Marine Mammal Care Center in San Pedro, volunteered to perform Loki’s very challenging oropharyngeal repair to fix the hole that was made from the monofilament cutting a hole from his neck into the back of his oral cavity.

Loki continued to defy all odds. He survived a severe entanglement, remote dart sedation, two surgeries and he was released back into the wild on May 21, 2021. Few entangled marine mammals are as lucky as Loki. Most succumb to their entanglements before any intervention can be made.

“Entanglements caused by commercial fishing operations continue to be one of the largest cause of injury and death to marine mammals. Estimates indicate that more than 650,000 marine mammals worldwide die as unintended fishery bycatch every single year,” said Peter Chang, PMMC CEO. “These entanglements can lead to months of suffering, with many ultimately drowning or starving to death. Loki was a fantastic story of survival, but he’s unfortunately one of the exceptions to the rule. Much more work needs to be done to revise current fishing practices, and PMMC looks forward to contributing to these discussions.”

Loki is the perfect example of PMMC’s commitment to the animals we serve. While he proved to be a challenge to rescue, they refused to give up. His journey from beginning to end also highlights the team work and collaboration that goes into helping these animals.

“We are beyond excited his recovery went smoothly and he is back out to his ocean home - but the risk of entanglement is still out there and it is possible he can become entangled again,” said Dr. Alissa Deming. “Sadly Loki’s case is a common one and it’s not the only issue they are facing.”

Loki case represents a major issue facing all wild marine mammals - ocean trash and irresponsible fisheries practices.
“Every year, PMMC and other marine mammal rescue facilities see similar cases. There needs to be a public outcry about unsustainable and harmful fisheries, and only the consumer can make that impact since most of these poor fishing practices occur in international waters - where State and Federal regulations cannot be enforced,” said Deming.

There are lots of things people can do to decrease the demand for fish capture in gillnets that are commonly the cause of entanglement of pinnipeds and dolphins. For example, supporting sustainably caught seafood, like hook and line caught halibut. If consumer dollars support responsible and sustainable caught seafood, more fisheries will shift to adapting those techniques. People’s action can matter and have an impact.

Loki definitely wins patient of the year. He captured the hearts of the PMMC staff, volunteer and visitors as well as the Dana Point marina community that was so instrumental in tracking his whereabouts prior to his rescue. PMMC would like to thank OC Sheriffs Harbor Patrol, NOAA, Dr. Tammy Da Costa Gomez, Scott Struthers, Bill Lackey and especially the public. It truly does take a village.
Dr. Tammy performing oropharyngeal repair.

Loki recovering at PMMC.

Loki under sedation with stiches.

Loki after stitches removal.

Loki being released back to the wild.

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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. PMMC is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization. Our Tax-ID number is: 95-3680896

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