



Staff Recommendation  
October 25, 2018

Item 6b2

**Support for the California Marine Mammal Stranding Network for  
Sea Lion and Seal Rescue and Rehabilitation**  
Paige Berube, Program Manager

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at the University of California Davis to support California Marine Mammal Stranding Network activities for sea lion and seal rescue and rehabilitation.

**LOCATION:** Statewide

**STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES:** Sustainable Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems, and Science-Based Decision-Making

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit A: California Marine Mammal Stranding Network Members & Maps
  - Exhibit B: California Sea Lion Strandings Graph
  - Exhibit C: Support Letters
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**FINDINGS AND RESOLUTION:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:  
“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the Ocean Protection Council hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Budget Act of 2018, which included a \$7.5 million General Fund appropriation to address whale and sea turtle entanglement, with a provision for \$1,000,000 which ‘shall be made available for the Marine Mammal Rescue and Rehabilitation Network for the purposes of sea lion and seal stranding rescue activities.’
3. The proposed project is not a ‘legal project’ that triggers the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If it were determined to be a ‘legal project’ under CEQA, the proposed project is categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the project involves information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.”

Staff further recommends that the OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The California Ocean Protection Council hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$1,000,000 to the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at the University of California Davis to support California Marine Mammal Stranding Network activities for sea lion and seal rescue and rehabilitation.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at the University of California Davis shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management and delivery.”

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The Budget Act of 2018 included a General Fund appropriation to the California Ocean Protection Council of \$7.5 million to address whale and sea turtle entanglement, with a provision for \$1,000,000 which, “shall be made available for the Marine Mammal Rescue and Rehabilitation Network for the purposes of sea lion and seal stranding rescue activities.”

Established in the early 1980s under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network members respond to marine mammal stranding events along the Washington, Oregon, and California coasts and are part of a nationwide network<sup>1</sup>. There are twelve organizations affiliated with the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network in California that respond to pinniped (seals and sea lion) strandings involving rescue and rehabilitation activities. Of these twelve organizations, eight organizations respond to live strandings and four organizations respond to dead sea lion and seal strandings – as shown in the maps in Exhibit A.

These twelve organizations include:

1. Northcoast Marine Mammal Center
2. Humboldt State University
3. The Marine Mammal Center
4. California Academy of Sciences
5. Long Marine Lab, University of California Santa Cruz
6. Moss Landing Marine Lab
7. Channel Islands Marine Wildlife Institute
8. California Wildlife Center
9. Marine Mammal Care Center at Fort MacArthur (now called Marine Mammal Care Center Los Angeles)
10. Marine Animal Rescue
11. Pacific Marine Mammal Center
12. Sea World San Diego

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected\\_species/marine\\_mammals/stranding\\_network.html](https://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected_species/marine_mammals/stranding_network.html)

California's Marine Mammal Stranding Network is composed of cooperating scientific investigators and institutions (primarily non-profit organizations), volunteer networks and individuals all of whom work under a letter of authorization from the National Marine Fisheries Service. Network members leverage volunteer to staff ratios of up to 20:1 to support stranding response activities. Most member organizations are funded primarily through charitable contributions, with some federal funding support.

In 2015, there were elevated strandings of California sea lions, and particularly of California sea lion pups. NOAA notes that California sea lions can strand for a variety of reasons including injury, illness, and weather and/or ocean conditions. In 2013, an Unusual Mortality Event Investigation Team and NOAA Fisheries stated that a change in availability of sea lion prey (including amount, type, quality and location of prey) was a likely contributor to elevated strandings. Peak strandings occurred in 2015. Other potential causes for elevated stranding include infectious disease outbreaks and harmful algal blooms (HABs); however, in 2016 although California was experiencing some HABs, there was no indication of disease or HABs being the cause of the elevated strandings in 2016. In January through June of 2016, California sea lion strandings were nearly two times higher than the average stranding level for January through June during 2003-2012; however, 2016 strandings were much lower than 2015 strandings during January through June (Exhibit B). NOAA Fisheries has collaborated with oceanographers and other scientists to help determine if environmental causes may have influenced elevated sea lion strandings.<sup>2</sup> In 2016 and 2017, elevated strandings included harbor seal and elephant seal pups, and northern and Guadalupe fur seals.

During these elevated strandings, the Marine Mammal Stranding Network member organizations performed a higher number of rescues and/or responses to both live and dead animals. This translated to an elevated financial and staff time demand across the marine mammal care network organizations. In 2015, the State of California provided \$1,000,000 through the Governor's Budget directly to the Wildlife Health Center at University of California Davis to support California Marine Mammal Stranding Network member's efforts for sea lion rescue and rehabilitation. In both 2016 and 2017, the Governor's Budget provided \$2,000,000 to the Wildlife Health Center at UC Davis to support California Marine Mammal Stranding Network member organizations. These funds were distributed to network member organizations by the Wildlife Health Center based on patient numbers, numbers of responses, and length of hospital or care time. Funds have supported additional temporary staff, animal food, medications, and center operations. A portion of the funds also support sea lion and seal necropsies and improved scientific understanding of the causes of stranding and/or death. These funds have ensured that Marine Mammal Stranding Network member organizations are prepared to respond to marine mammal crises, and to ensure the centers can continue current and ongoing research into the patients treated for the benefit of wildlife and ocean resources.

The Budget Act of 2018 provided \$1,000,000 to the Ocean Protection Council which, "shall be made available for the Marine Mammal Rescue and Rehabilitation Network for the purposes of sea lion and seal stranding rescue activities." This staff recommendation proposes working with the Wildlife Health Center at the University of California Davis to disburse funds to the

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected\\_species/marine\\_mammals/sea\\_lion\\_UME.html](https://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected_species/marine_mammals/sea_lion_UME.html)

California Marine Mammal Stranding Network member organizations who respond to both live and dead sea lion and seal strandings.

Funding allocation across network member organizations will include a base compensation for all twelve organizations involved in seal and sea lion rescue and rehabilitation activities for the purposes of supporting general operating expenses. General operating expenses may include personnel, travel, veterinary supplies, animal food, operating supplies, and research. In addition to the base compensation, funding will be allocated across network member organizations based on the number of live animals rescued and/or the number of dead animals collected during the calendar year of 2018, as well as based on per animal rehabilitated and per amount of time animals were cared for during rehabilitation. This allocation ensures that no one organization is put in an advantageous or disadvantageous position based on either number of admissions or time spent before disposition.

**About the Grantee:**

The Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at the University of California Davis works to maintain the health of wildlife, people and environment through science, technology and education. The Wildlife Health Center is the largest center within the One Health Institute, which recognizes that the health of domestic animals, wildlife, people and the environment as inextricably linked. As a part of the University of California Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, projects and programs focus on free-ranging and captive terrestrial and aquatic wild animals. Through service, training and research in a variety of programs, the Wildlife Health Center also aims to restore ecosystem health and address complex issues like zoonotic diseases that impact animals and humans.

**Project Timeline:** November 2018 – March 2020

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$1,000,000 to the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at the University of California Davis to support California Marine Mammal Stranding Network activities for sea lion and seal rescue and rehabilitation.

Ocean Protection Council	\$1,000,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Ocean Protection Council’s General Fund appropriation from the 2018 Budget Act, which included \$7.5 million to address whale and sea turtle entanglement, with a provision for \$1,000,000 which, “shall be made available for the Marine Mammal Rescue and Rehabilitation Network for the purposes of sea lion and seal stranding rescue activities.”

**CONSISTENCY WITH CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION ACT:**

The proposed project is consistent with the California Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b) as projects which:

- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE OPC'S STRATEGIC PLAN:**

This project implements Focal Area A: Science-Based Decision-Making and Focal Area C: Sustainable Fisheries and Marine Ecosystems.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed project is not a 'legal project' that triggers the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If it were determined to be a 'legal project' under CEQA, the proposed project is categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the project involves information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval by the OPC.