



April 15, 2020

Dear public official:

We write to share a recent decision about setting a new focus for the New England Aquarium's Marine Animal Rescue Team. The Aquarium will phase out its rescue and response activities for stranded marine mammals from the North Shore to the South Shore of Massachusetts over the next two years and direct the public to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to handle emergency responses.

Over the past five years, the Aquarium's resources have been increasingly needed for rescue and rehabilitation of stranded sea turtles. The number of annual strandings of endangered sea turtles has tripled, placing significant new demands on the capacity of the Aquarium staff and facilities. During this same time, we have continued to operate a very busy marine mammal stranding hotline covering the shoreline from Plymouth to Salem, MA. Most of those calls are related to monitoring seals, whose populations have experienced an enormous comeback across the region over the past three decades—a significant marine conservation success. The Aquarium has not conducted seal rehabilitation for more than a decade given their robust populations. For decades, we have also been responsible for stranding response for large whales, dolphins, and harbor porpoises. Although federally protected, many of these species are not endangered in our region. As such, we have decided to focus our resources on rescue and rehabilitation of endangered sea turtles.

We will continue our current work with marine mammals until April 30, 2020. After that, we will assist NOAA with whales, dolphins, and porpoises (cetaceans) on a case-by-case basis, depending on our availability. Our right whale programs and sea turtle rescue efforts will be unaffected by this decision. We will guide the public on how to reach NOAA in the event of a stranding through our hotline and website. In addition to contacting officials in local government and coastal institutions, we intend to alert the local media so citizens are informed as well.

#### TIMELINE

<b>April 30, 2020</b>	<b>Cease all seal activities and eliminate stranding hotline.</b>
<b>May 1–August 31, 2020</b>	<b>At the request of NOAA, assist with live and dead cetaceans on a case-by-case basis.</b>
<b>September 1, 2020– September 1, 2021</b>	<b>At the request of NOAA, assist with live cetaceans on a case-by-case basis.</b>

We are confident that this new focus will enable our rescue and rehabilitation work to have the greatest possible impact.

Sincerely,

Leigh Clayton, Charles Innis, and Connie Merigo of the New England Aquarium