FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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The Marine Mammal Center Admits New Hawaiian Monk Seal Patients

(Kailua-Kona. – August 25, 2016) – Four malnourished endangered Hawaiian monk seals were transported by NOAA from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and brought late yesterday to The Marine Mammal Center’s monk seal hospital, Ke Kai Ola, where they will receive rehabilitative care.

“These iconic animals get a second chance at life because of our ongoing, special partnership with NOAA,” says Dr. Shawn Johnson, Director of Veterinary Science of The Marine Mammal Center. “Every step of the way - from the moment they were rescued to their time at the hospital to their release back to the wild - these Hawaiian monk seals will receive the best medical support available.”

Onboard the NOAA Research Vessel Oscar Elton Sette, the four monk seals underwent physical exams and had bloodwork done. They have begun a strict treatment regime, including oral electrolytes, subcutaneous fluids, fish-mash tube feedings and antibiotics. Two of the new patients are pups that were weaned too early, one is a yearling and the other is an extremely underweight five-year-old.

“Even though the five-year-old Hawaiian monk seal is older than our typical patients from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, she is much smaller and thinner than the others in her cohort,” says Dr. Michelle Barbieri, Wildlife Veterinary Medical Officer with NOAA’s Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program. “She has generally declined in condition over the past two seasons, and appeared to decline even more dramatically this season.”

Hawaiian monk seals, which have been on the decline for decades, have a current population of about 1,300 individuals. Young seals are the most vulnerable animals in the population with relatively few surviving to adulthood. Pups and juvenile seals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands often fall victim to threats like entanglement in ocean trash, changes in the food chain and predation. NOAA has a suite of tools to combat many of these threats and the partnership with The Marine Mammal Center to rehabilitate skinny seals is one of the most critical.
The *Oscar Elton Sette* shuttled the pups by small boat to Kona as part of its final mission on a 24-day research cruise. In addition to picking up the new monk seal patients, the ship retrieved five teams of researchers and their equipment that were deployed across the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. These scientists have been studying seals in remote locations for several months as part of the program's long-running Assessment and Recovery Camps.

These four Hawaiian monk seals will stay at The Marine Mammal Center’s $3.2 million facility near Kailua-Kona on Hawaii Island, named Ke Kai Ola (The Healing Sea). The hospital includes two neonate (newborn) rehabilitation pens and pools, quarantine pen areas and two larger pens and pools for older seals.

“There are opportunities to volunteer at the hospital after going through a number of animal care trainings,” says Deb Wickham, Ke Kai Ola’s Operations Manager. “We always stress to our volunteers the importance of maintaining limited visual and physical human contact so that we keep these animals wild.”

Since opening two years ago, The Marine Mammal Center's veterinary experts at Ke Kai Ola have successfully rehabilitated and returned 15 monk seals to the wild – more than one percent of the species’ total population. The Marine Mammal Center's team also monitors Hawaiian monk seal haul out activity in West Hawaii and manages rescue efforts for any sick and injured seals reported to the hospital’s 24-hour hotline (808-987-0765).

Interviews Available:
- Dr. Michelle Barbieri, Wildlife Veterinary Medical Officer, NOAA Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program
- Dr. Shawn Johnson, Director of Veterinary Science, The Marine Mammal Center
- Deb Wickham, Operations Manager, Ke Kai Ola

Assets:
Available via Dropbox.

Learn more about Hawaiian monk seals and how you can support their ongoing care at the [Hawaiian Monk Seal Hospital](#).

Learn more about the [NOAA Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program](#)

**About The Marine Mammal Center**

The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit veterinary hospital, research and educational center dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of sick and injured marine mammals and to the study of their health. Since 1975, the Center has been headquartered in the Marin Headlands, Sausalito, Calif., within the Golden Gate National Parks and has rescued and treated more than 20,000 marine mammals. In 2014, the Center opened Ke Kai Ola, a hospital for the rehabilitation of the
critically endangered Hawaiian monk seal, in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. For more information, please visit www.marinemammalcenter.org. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.