



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **The Marine Mammal Center assists in the successful disentanglement of a humpback whale in Monterey Bay**

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – December 17, 2019) – Expert first responders from The Marine Mammal Center and several partner agencies under the direction of The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) successfully disentangled a juvenile humpback whale from fishery debris on December 13 in Monterey Bay. The successful effort marks an increased ability for the Center and partners in NOAA’s West Coast Large Whale Entanglement Response Program to utilize strong, long-term partnerships to pool necessary experience and expertise when mounting a response to an entangled whale.

“The stars really have to align for a mission like this because there are so many moving pieces from weather conditions to distance from shore to the ability to locate the whale,” says Kathi George, Global Response Project Manager at The Marine Mammal Center. “In order for the mission to move forward, you need to have an experienced crew, the right equipment and a solid plan in place that prioritizes human safety.”

On December 13, a tow boat operator reported an entangled whale to the U.S. Coast Guard allowing stand-by response teams to locate the animal and determine the configuration of the fishery debris was life threatening. Experts initially attached five large bouys to the whale to help slow it down. Using a small inflatable boat to carefully approach the animal, experts made a single cut utilizing a specialized tool to cut the debris free from the whale’s back. The successful cut allowed the whale to swim away freely and the gear was collected for documentation. The source of the entanglement has not been confirmed.

“Our work in responding to entangled whales is absolutely critical and necessary—but it’s vital that we also look at the larger issue in a holistic way,” says Ryan Berger, Northern Range Operations Manager at The Marine Mammal Center. “It’s going to take research, innovation and partnerships with fishermen, industries and communities to solve the more complex problems that lead to entanglements in the first place.”

The entangled humpback whale was first reported off the coast of Capitola by a fishing vessel to the Center and NOAA’s entangled whale hotline on December 9 and subsequently on December 10 and 11. Responses by the USCG on December 9 and a multi-agency response on December 11 were unsuccessful in initially locating the whale.

Without intervention, an entanglement of this severity on a growing animal would eventually lead to death. For long-lived animals like these that are slow to mature and slow to reproduce, the loss of just

one individual can have a population-level impact.

The Center's addition this year of a new Cetacean Field Research Program and California Whale Rescue marks an increased capacity to deploy experts as a leading first responders to whales, dolphins and porpoises in distress.

The multi-day effort included experts from the Marine Life Studies' Whale Entanglement Team, Cascadia Research and SR3 Sealife Response Rehabilitation and Research.

### **BACKGROUND ON HUMPBACK WHALES:**

According to NOAA Fisheries, before a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1985, all populations of humpback whales were greatly reduced, some by more than 95 percent. The species is increasing in abundance in much of its range, but faces threats from entanglement in fishing gear, vessel strikes, vessel-based harassment, underwater noise and habitat impacts. According to the most recent population estimates, approximately 1,400 humpbacks frequent the California and Oregon coasts in the summer and fall. In recent years, humpbacks have been observed more and more frequently feeding along the California coast.

### **HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP:**

- Report entangled whales to NOAA Fisheries entangled whale hotline by calling 1-877-SOS-WHALE (767-9245).
- Report sick and injured marine mammals to The Marine Mammal Center by calling 415-289-SEAL (7325).
- The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit and depends on donations from members of the public to respond to and care for marine mammals and conduct critical scientific research.
- Visit [MarineMammalCenter.org/donate](http://MarineMammalCenter.org/donate) to help the Center perform its life-saving work.

### **ABOUT THE MARINE MAMMAL CENTER**

The Marine Mammal Center is guided and inspired by a shared vision of a healthy ocean for marine mammals and humans alike. Its mission is to advance global ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education. As the world's largest marine mammal hospital, the Center is a global leader in marine mammal health, science and conservation.

In 2014, the Center opened Ke Kai Ola, a hospital and visitor center dedicated to the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, in Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i. Its academic year-long marine science and ocean conservation program, Nā Kōkua o ke Kai, engages middle-school youth and teachers through classroom work, field trips and professional development for teachers.

For more information, please visit [MarineMammalCenter.org](http://MarineMammalCenter.org). Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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