

**JUNE 7, 2009**

## **BELUGA WHALE AURORA, GIVES BIRTH TO FEMALE CALF**

**Birth occurred at 3:39pm June 7 in a rare and wondrous moment**

**Amazing footage of today's beluga whale birth now online at <http://youtube.com/vancouveraquarium>**

**Vancouver, BC** – The Vancouver Aquarium's marine mammal care and veterinary teams, staff and volunteers, are delighted to announce that Aurora, a 20 year old beluga whale, gave birth today.

The amazing event occurred at 3:39pm (PST) after a 3-hour labour. The Aquarium's veterinary team has determined with 90% certainty the calf is female (it can be up to 6 months before gender determination becomes certain). Immediately following her birth, the calf swam right up to the surface of the water for her first breaths, the first of many critical milestones in the development of a newborn calf. Aurora's natural maternal instincts were also immediately evident as she instinctively picked up her calf, guided her to the surface for breaths, and swam continuously with her by her side.

The calf and mother are doing well and will remain under 24-hour observation by the Aquarium's veterinary and marine mammal care teams. The first 12-24 hours following birth is a key observation period for critical milestones for the calf and its relationship with the mother including bonding and nursing. Veterinary staff estimate the calf's length to be 1.5 metres (~5 feet) and her weight to be 60-70kg (132-154lbs). The new baby is a slate, smoky grey colour which will gradually lighten as the whale matures; calves are normally quite wrinkled for the first several weeks.

"This is an exciting time for everyone – Aurora, her calf, our other belugas and certainly for Aquarium staff, volunteers and the community-at-large. Aurora and her calf are coming along nicely together. There are several critical milestones for the calf to reach over the next few days and weeks," said Dr. Marty Haulena, Staff Veterinarian, Vancouver Aquarium. "Aurora has proven herself to be a great mother in the past and today we've already observed her maternal instincts come to the fore. She's doing just a great job so far."

Vancouver Aquarium members and visitors will be able to view Aurora and her yet-to-be-named calf from 5 or 6 metres away on the upper deck of the Beluga habitat. Marine mammal care staff and researchers will observe behaviours and interactions, while interpretive staff will present what is learned to visitors providing an engaging and rare educational opportunity.

Aurora's delivery of a calf today marks the first occasion for two beluga calves to share a habitat at the Vancouver Aquarium. This is new territory for the Aquarium and timing to introduce mother Qila and 1-year-old Tiqa, will be determined over the coming days based upon the continued health and well-being of the new mother and calf. Aurora's calf was sired by Imaq, the sole male beluga whale at the Vancouver Aquarium. Aurora's daughter Qila (pronounced: KEE-lah) age 13 and granddaughter Tiqa (pronounced: TEE-kah) age 1, are temporarily located in an adjacent habitat. The Aquarium's other two beluga whales, Imaq 21 and Kavna 39, are being cared for a behind-the-scenes habitat.

**SPECIAL NOTE FOR MEDIA:** HD B-roll available upon request via ftp as: Quicktime DVCPRO HD, Quicktime h.254 and Quicktime DV Standard Definition. Copies can be provided on data DVD's. Still images also available upon request.

- Interviews w/ veterinary and marine mammal care team spokespersons are available and entirely dependent upon the health and safety of Aurora and her calf.
- FAQ on Aurora and beluga whales available under separate cover

The Vancouver Aquarium is a self-supporting, non-profit association dedicated to effecting the conservation of aquatic life through display and interpretation, conservation practices, education, research, and direct action. Please visit [www.vanaqua.org](http://www.vanaqua.org) to find out more about Vancouver Aquarium.

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