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VANCOUVER AQUARIUM HARBOUR SEALS MAKE A SPLASH AFTER BEING RELEASED BY DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

Vancouver, B.C. - The Vancouver Aquarium released 14 harbour seals back into Howe Sound today at Porteau Cove. Approximately 50 of the volunteers who helped with their rehabilitation came along to help release the seals.

The Marine Mammal Rescue Centre (VAMMRC) rehabilitates marine mammals that are in need of care. So far this year 158 harbour seal pups that were abandoned, injured or sick have been treated at the rescue centre.

Each year the seals are named based on a theme and this year is no different with the theme being mountain summits. Seals including Robson, Fuji and Coola were returned back to the ocean today. "We have this volunteer-lead seal release once a year so we can give our volunteers this opportunity to see the seals being returned back to the ocean," says Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Manager, Lindsay Akhurst. "It is nice for the volunteers to be present for the final part of the rehabilitation process to see just how much their hard work and dedication have paid off."

The over 150 volunteers, interns and work experience students who dedicate their time to VAMMRC are an integral part of the centre's success. "We have had a tremendously successful year with the hard work of the staff and countless volunteers, interns and veterinary students, resulting in a fantastic release rate. We are all very proud of the work we have done here," said Martin Haulena, Aquarium veterinarian.

Without the support and dedication of volunteers, the VAMMRC would not be able to operate at its current capacity. Those who are interested in becoming a volunteer for the Vancouver Aquarium are encouraged to go to its website or call for more information.

"Even though it is dirty work, it is incredibly rewarding," said Debbie Favero, who is in her third year of volunteering with the VAMMRC. "We are trained to not get emotionally attached to the seals, but once they have been released and look back at you with their big eyes, it is almost as if they are asking you why you aren't coming with them. It just makes you melt! But then off they go and you just feel so amazing afterwards, as if you have really made a difference."

The VAMMRC is reminding the public: if you happen to come across a marine mammal that you believe to be in distress please call the VAMMRC and, if possible, send them a photo of the animal so that they can assess the situation to see if the animal does in fact need to be rescued. Also, it is best to keep people and pets away from the animal, and observe it from a short distance away.

About Vancouver Aquarium Marine Mammal Rescue Centre

The primary goal of the Marine Mammal Rescue and Rehabilitation Program is to provide shelter and care for ill, injured or abandoned marine mammals and to rehabilitate them for release back into their natural habitat. Learn more at www.vanaqua.org/mmr.

About Vancouver Aquarium

The Vancouver Aquarium is a global leader in connecting people to our natural world, and a self-supporting, non-profit association dedicated to effecting the conservation of aquatic life through display and interpretation, education, research, and direct action. Learn more at www.vanaqua.org.

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Media Contact:

Roxanne St-Pierre

Vancouver Aquarium

604.659.3752 | publicrelations@vanaqua.org