



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

3 June 2014

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman  
Chief, Branch of Permits  
Division of Management Authority  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
4401 North Fairfax Drive  
Arlington, VA 22203

Re: Permit Application No. 186914  
(Monterey Bay Aquarium)

Dear Mr. Van Norman:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the MMPA). The Monterey Bay Aquarium (MBAQ) is seeking to renew and amend its permit to conduct research on sea otters that have been rescued from the wild, are undergoing rehabilitation, and could be returned to the wild. MBAQ is authorized to take southern sea otters associated with rescue, rehabilitation, and release to the wild under Permit 032027.

MBAQ's research focuses on sea otter (1) health, disease, and basic biology, (2) stress, (3) behavior and cognition, (4) foraging ecology and movement patterns, and (5) survival. Researchers are authorized to harass, observe, capture/recapture, transport, restrain, sedate, sample (see Table 1 in the application), mark (with PIT and flipper tags), instrument, and conduct a controlled pharmacokinetics study on sea otters. MBAQ is authorized to conduct the specified activities on individuals of various age classes and either sex.

MBAQ is requesting multiple changes<sup>1</sup> to its permit—

- (1) attaching flipper-mounted, solar-powered biotelemetry devices to sea otters;
- (2) conducting adrenocorticotrophic hormone stimulation tests with serial blood sampling on captive sea otters;
- (3) reducing the minimum sea otter mass from 15 to 10 kg for the captive pharmacokinetics study;
- (4) amending the number of releasable sea otters instrumented with implantable devices—some otters may be recaptured<sup>2</sup> to replace a transmitter once in a given year or to retrieve a transmitter and/or collect samples twice in a given year;
- (5) allowing surrogate-reared pups to be raised in the sea otter exhibit and released at open-coast sites rather than Elkhorn Slough to investigate long-term survival;

<sup>1</sup> See Table 2 in the application for specific numbers of takes for various activities.

<sup>2</sup> Up to five sea otters could be harassed incidental to each recapture event.

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- (6) archiving and analyzing samples (based on Table 1) for retrospective and future research projects from live-stranded sea otters euthanized under Permit 032027; and
- (7) including up to one research-related mortality (intentional via euthanasia or unintentional) and associated necropsy.

All sedation, sampling, and surgical implantation would occur under the supervision and discretion of the attending veterinarian. An individual sea otter could be recaptured<sup>3</sup> and re-instrumented no more than four times during sea otter's lifetime. In addition, sea otters would only undergo one research-related surgical implantation within a 6-month period. MBAQ would comply with Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service standards for the transport of any sea otter. MBAQ's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has reviewed and approved the research protocols.

The Commission believes that the activities for which MBAQ has requested a permit renewal are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service issue the permit, as requested.

The Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on this permit amendment application. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,



Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

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<sup>3</sup> Near-term pregnant females would not be recaptured or re-instrumented.