



Media Contact: Briana Sapp Tivey
Director of Marketing and Communications
Email: bsapptivey@sbnature2.org
Phone: 805-682-4711 ext. 117

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***Saving the White Abalone* Installation Opens at Sea Center**

New display offers chance to see endangered species revitalization project up close

(Santa Barbara, CA – July 10, 2019) — The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center on Stearns Wharf recently unveiled a new installation entitled “Saving the White Abalone” that highlights its conservation work to bring the local species back from the brink of extinction.

White Abalone were the first marine invertebrates to be listed as endangered in the United States (2001). Overharvesting by humans led to the dramatic decline of the White Abalone, which now exist in such small numbers that they can no longer reproduce in the wild. Where once there were perhaps millions, several thousand White Abalone remain, and it is no longer legal to harvest them. The best hope for saving the White Abalone is to spawn them in captivity, with a long-term goal of releasing large numbers back into their native habitats.

As a member of the White Abalone Restoration Consortium (WARC), the Sea Center plays a helpful role in the recovery of this species. For the past thirteen years, the Sea Center has been home to a cohort of mature White Abalone. These endangered marine snails have participated in induced spawning events, releasing gametes that conservation scientists at partner institutions mix with eggs to create larvae. Through coordinated induced spawning events, WARC members increase the abundance of White Abalone in captivity.

Following several successes, in 2014, the Sea Center received a cohort of young snails to rear, the progeny of captive snails. If all goes to plan, the new installation will soon host a third generation of microscopic White Abalone larvae, raised in trough enclosures like those used by commercial abalone farmers. This most recent addition gives the Sea Center a unique opportunity to illustrate the abalone life cycle and explain conservation efforts to the public.

Fostering genetic diversity among a dwindling population is a major challenge for the WARC, who have a limited number of animals to crossbreed due to the rarity of the species and restrictions on collecting wild animals, even for conservation purposes. The new generation is an exciting development for all WARC partners. Sea Center Live Collections & Husbandry Manager Thomas Wilson explains: “The most recent spawning at WARC partner UC Davis Bodega Marine Laboratory was exciting because it was the first time since the program’s inception that new genes were introduced.” The abalone larvae in the Sea Center’s new installation are the result of a cross between a wild female that conservationists were recently permitted to collect, and a captive-bred male.

The new display will educate the public by raising awareness of White Abalone’s endangered status and efforts to save them. The installation’s aim is to explain how human activities can harm—and help—endangered species.

Wilson shares, “This new installation spans several years of work and collaboration with the WARC. It is the first time that we have ever tried to raise recently settled, juvenile white abalone, and they will need lots of attention. This is an exciting, albeit, stressful time for the Sea Center. I am hopeful that, as we move forward, we can continue to increase our participation with the WARC to save this species.”

WARC members include National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), California Department of Fish and Wildlife, UC Davis Bodega Marine Laboratory, Aquarium of the Pacific, Cabrillo Marine Aquarium,

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center, University of California Santa Barbara and the Marine Science Institute, The Cultured Abalone, The Abalone Farm, National Park Service, UCSD – Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Occidental College, The Bay Foundation, CICESE – Ensenada Center for Scientific Research and Higher Education, and California Science Center.

The new installation can be viewed on the 2nd floor of the Sea Center which is open daily from 10:00 AM–5:00 PM. For more information visit sbnature.org/seacenter.

About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center

Discover the wonders of ocean life at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center. Located on historic Stearns Wharf, this highly interactive aquarium and marine education facility offers visitors close encounters with marine animals, and exploration of the Santa Barbara Channel on the Wet Deck. In addition to permanent exhibits, the Sea Center hosts unique events and special educational programming, including Underwater Parks Day, World Oceans Day, and its *Live Dive* series.



New "Saving the White Abalone" Installation at the Sea Center on Stearns Wharf

###