

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Virginia Aquarium Experiences Record-Breaking Hooked Sea Turtle Season

(Virginia Beach, VA) – 2022 is a record-breaking year for the most hooked sea turtle responses in the history of the Stranding Response Program at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center. Hooked sea turtle season, referring to a time when sea turtles are caught by hooks on fishing lines during recreational fishing season, began in late April in Hampton Roads and the number of hooked turtle events has accelerated tremendously. From April 30 (the first reported hooked turtle) to June 27, the Virginia Aquarium has reported 58 hooked turtles, of which 51 have been recovered for rehabilitation and 26 of those turtles have been successfully released. Previously, the former record was 45 hooked sea turtle responses in 2018.

As of June 28, 2022, the Stranding Response Team has 21 turtles in rehabilitation at the Darden Marine Animal Conservation Center (DMACC) – 19 of which are hooked turtle patients. Most of the patients have been Kemp's ridley sea turtles which is a critically endangered species that is part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Saving Animals from Extinction (SAFE) conservation program. The rehab spaces within DMACC are filling up as calls from civilians continue to come in weekly with new hooked turtle reports. Turtles with no complications or additional hooks can often be released within 24 hours. However, when fishing hook removal requires advanced medical intervention or turtles are otherwise compromised, they are released back into the ocean when they are healthy, which can be days to months later. Therefore, the team has turned to their counterparts at neighboring facilities to help with the case load. Five hooked turtles and two recovering cold stunned turtles have been transferred to facilities with the expertise and capabilities to rehabilitate turtles, including Sea Turtle Recovery in New Jersey, the South Carolina Aquarium and NC State University CMAST.

In Virginia, hooked sea turtle season occurs throughout recreational fishing season, which takes place predominantly in May and June but can be seen through September. This year, the Stranding Response Team has received high call volumes from Buckroe and Virginia Beach Fishing Piers. The Virginia Aquarium partners with these piers and others throughout the community through the Virginia Aquarium Pier Partner Program to educate local anglers, minimize harm to turtles during hooking events, and provide quality medical care for hooked sea turtles. The four partnered piers have signage, recovery gear and pier staff who are willing to assist when a hooked sea turtle is reported. *It is important to note that anglers will not get in trouble for accidentally hooking a sea turtle*; please do not release the turtle and report it to the Virginia Aquarium's Stranding Response Team at 757-385-7575.

What to do if a sea turtle is hooked by a fishing line:

- Inform the pier attendant (if there is one) ASAP who can supply recovery gear
- Call the Virginia Aquarium's Stranding Response Team at 757-385-7575
- Use a net to bring the turtle to the top of the pier. DO NOT lift by the hook if at all avoidable. Lifting by the hook can cause severe damage
- If the turtle is too large to net, try to walk it to the beach
- Leave the hook in place. Removing it may cause harm and make medical treatment more difficult
- When you have control of the turtle, cut the line but leave at least two feet of line attached to the hook
- Keep turtle out of direct sunlight
- Cover carapace (shell) with damp towel

Support the Virginia Aquarium's mission by making a tax-deductible [donation](#) or by purchasing a 'Protect Sea Life' [license plate](#) from the Virginia DMV, which features a loggerhead sea turtle, a threatened species in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean. A portion of the license plate funds are transferred to the Virginia Aquarium Foundation in support of our conservation and research programs, including the Stranding Response Program.

Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center

*The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's mission is to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research, and sustainable practices. The Virginia Aquarium is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. The Aquarium is also a member of World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. It is located at 717 General Booth Boulevard, just south of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach.*

*The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, supports the work of the Virginia Aquarium. The Foundation procures and maintains the Aquarium's exhibits, including the animals and habitats. It is also responsible for annual and capital fundraising, administration and funding for the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program, conservation and scientific research efforts, and the Aquarium's mission-related education programs. You can be a part of our mission by making a [tax-deductible donation](#) to support our programming.*

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