

NEWS RELEASE

717 General Booth Blvd. Virginia Beach, VA 23451



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Mackenzie Di Nardo | MDiNardo@VirginiaAquarium.com

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VIRGINIA AQUARIUM MOURNS LOSS OF BELOVED KOMODO DRAGON

(Virginia Beach, VA) – Staff at the Virginia Aquarium are mourning the loss of Sanchez, a 17-year-old Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*). Sanchez was an active and precocious dragon. He loved resting in the sunlight, overlooking Owls Creek, and coming nose-to-nose with guests who visited him. He will be missed dearly.

Sanchez was born on January 5, 2005 at the Columbus Zoo. He joined the Virginia Aquarium in 2007 when the Restless Planet exhibit gallery opened. For more than 15 years, he educated and inspired guests to love and protect animals and the environment. He lived a wholesome life and was easily motivated by food, making him a quick learner during behavioral training.

Our veterinary and animal care team observed signs that Sanchez's health was declining this week. Supportive care, medical management, and diagnostics were initiated, but his health and quality of life did not improve with treatment. He was monitored continuously and provided medical support to ensure his comfort. After thoughtful and careful study of Sanchez's condition, the Aquarium team made the difficult decision to euthanize him, surrounded by the Aquarium's veterinary and animal care teams. A cause for the acute changes in his health condition has not yet been determined. A necropsy is being conducted by the Virginia Aquarium and additional diagnostic tests will be sent out for analysis.

"As I personally reflect on Sanchez's impact, it gives me great comfort knowing he was one of our most powerful ambassadors. We will miss him deeply," said Cynthia Whitbred-Spanoulis, Executive Director of the Virginia Aquarium. "This news is devastating, especially for our herpetology team and our veterinary staff. They are devoted to providing outstanding care for our animals. We appreciate your support and understanding during this difficult time."

Images of Sanchez are available [HERE](#).

The work at the Virginia Aquarium goes beyond introducing guests to animals or teaching visitors about their habitats and behaviors. The Aquarium is also dedicated to preserving the future of the animals. Komodo dragons are native to Indonesia and are an endangered species according to the IUCN Red List. There are less than 1,400 mature Komodo dragons estimated in the world, and the Aquarium participates in the Species Survival Plan of this treasured species as managed through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center 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. The Virginia Aquarium's mission is to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research, and sustainable practices. 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: make a tax-deductible donation to support our incredible programming.

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