



For Immediate Release: 2-19-13

Contact:

- Nadine Slimak, Director of Communications, Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium, 941-388-4441, ext. 417, or nadines@mote.org

**Mote Marine Laboratory Announces New
International Marine Conservation Consortium
with U.S. and International Partners**

Consortium will focus conservation efforts on places where critical needs for habitat and species protection remain

The numbers are appalling and unacceptable: Of the 63,837 species worldwide that have undergone population assessments, 19,817 — a startling one out of three — are threatened with extinction.* But in reality, those figures don't take into account the threats to species that have never been studied; nor do they address the threats to human populations that occur when species disappear.

Now, a new coalition of aquariums, zoos and governmental and non-governmental organizations hosted at Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium will address some of these critical needs for conservation of marine mammals, sea turtles, sea birds and other species in locations worldwide that have been underserved by science-based initiatives.

The new **International Consortium for Marine Conservation**, with partners in the U.S. and abroad, will be led by Director Dr. John Reynolds, Senior Scientist at Mote Marine Laboratory and immediate past chairman of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission.

The creation of the International Consortium for Marine Conservation was announced by Reynolds this week during the Second Signatory State Meeting of the Dugong MOU of the Convention of Migratory Species of the United Nations Environment Programme in Manila, Philippines. The meeting focused on enhancing global conservation of dugongs, found in three-dozen range states around the globe and was the perfect venue to announce this new consortium, Reynolds said.

“Traditional thinking has been that if you do good science, conservation will follow as a natural outcome,” said Reynolds, who chaired the Marine Mammal Commission under four Presidential administrations between 1991 and 2010. “But in reality, the translation from science to conservation is far from automatic. If the social and political will to make change isn’t there, then the conservation measures that are needed will never be enacted. Science is extremely valuable to inform conservation decisions, but conservation takes much more than just the science to succeed.”

Instead of focusing only on science, the International Consortium for Marine Conservation will also draw in groups with social, economic, cultural and policy specialties to work proactively on solutions to environmental issues, Reynolds said.

“This is really coalition-building for conservation,” he said. “We will have a bottom-up approach by working with grassroots organizations. But we will also have a top-down approach by working with decision makers, including legislators. That way, we’re all working toward the same end and will be able to accomplish projects that lead to protecting animals and their habitats. In turn, that benefits humans, too.”

Members and Associate Members of the International Consortium include:

- Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium
- Alaska SeaLife Center
- BASE Entertainment
- Dolphin Quest (on behalf of Ocean Quest Conservation Foundation, Malaysia)
- Eckerd College
- Georgia Aquarium
- KRE8 360
- The MareCet Research Organization, Malaysia
- Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI), Tampa, FL
- Mystic Aquarium, a division of Sea Research Foundation
- National Aquarium in Baltimore
- North Slope Borough
- Saint Louis Zoo
- Southern Caribbean Cetacean Network

“As a premier science institution with a conservation focus that includes the study of beluga whales in Alaska to coral restoration in the Caribbean, Georgia Aquarium is proud to be one of the founding members of this consortium,” said David Kimmel, President and Chief Operating Officer of Georgia Aquarium. “This consortium employs a proactive strategy for achieving positive results, and has the ability to make a difference by pooling the collective resources of these premier institutions.”

“MareCet is most proud and excited to be a part of this new conservation coalition,” said Dr. Louisa Ponnampalam, the organization’s Chairperson and Co-Founder. “As a new marine conservation grassroots NGO, being in the ICMC will allow us to enhance our mission of improving marine conservation within Southeast Asia

through the extensive networking and technical support and know-how of international partners within the Consortium.”

The Consortium will initially focus its conservation efforts in three geographic regions: Alaska, Southeast Asia and the wider Caribbean. “These are three areas where there’s a critical need for conservation, yet there are insufficient integrated initiatives,” Reynolds said.

In Alaska, for example, climate change and the resulting change in sea ice is opening up new areas to fishing and energy exploration, according to Reynolds, who has worked with Alaska Native groups and a range of scientists and agencies for two decades in his role as Chairman of the Marine Mammal Commission and who has studied bowhead and beluga whales, spotted seals, walrus, and polar bears since about 2000.

“Climate change is a real game changer in Alaska,” he said. “In the North Slope, they’re seeing diseases like rabies and species that they’ve never seen before. Ecosystems are shifting. With that comes the opening of new areas to fishing and oil and gas exploration. The threats are outpacing the conservation efforts to maintain and protect species, ecosystems and subsistence communities and cultures.”

For Mote — an independent, nonprofit organization — bringing together the groups that will participate in the International Consortium for Marine Conservation was a natural extension of the organization’s focus on marine science research and on the sustainable use and revitalization of natural resources, said Dr. Michael Crosby, Senior Vice President of Research at Mote, and Consortium’s first Chairman of the Board. “The Consortium’s mission reflects a proactive strategy for achieving direct and positive impacts, rather than simply in developing information and research results with a hope that others will take action. In this way, we believe we will have the ability to help communities maintain their cultural heritage and good health.”

The founding members of the consortium include organizations with important accomplishments and capabilities in science, as well as groups that bring vital skills in education, marketing, communications and community-based conservation to the table, Reynolds said. And many of the partners have distinguished track records in conservation.

“I’m excited about bringing this outstanding group of organizations together,” Reynolds said. “There is no doubt that by working together, we will accomplish a great deal. I cannot wait for the Founding Board to meet to give me my marching orders!”

**Source: The IUCN Red List 2012 report.*



About Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium

Founded in 1955, Mote Marine Laboratory is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)3 research organization based in Sarasota, Fla., with field stations in eastern Sarasota County, Charlotte Harbor and the Florida Keys. Mote is dedicated to today's research for tomorrow's oceans with an emphasis on world-class research relevant to conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, healthy habitats and natural resources. Mote's vision includes positively impacting public policy through science-based outreach and education. Showcasing this research is The Aquarium at Mote, open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. 365 days a year. Learn more at www.mote.org.