

**Celebrating one of our valued wildlife partners this World Veterinary Day, Saturday 27 April**

An interview with the Sea World Foundation's Head Veterinarian, Dr Claire Madden

**The theme for this year's World Veterinary Day is 'Veterinarians are essential health workers'. How many wildlife cases would you see in a year and how essential is the care that Sea World is able to provide?**

The Sea World Foundation attends to hundreds of animals each year, with last year being one of the busiest on record with over 430 individual animal rescues. In addition to animal rescues, the Sea World Foundation also conducts hundreds of hours of research activities supporting universities, government agencies and other like-minded organisations in wildlife conservation.

**Wildlife rescues undertaken by the Sea World Foundation team range from whales, dolphins, turtles, seals and sea birds. Can you give us one or two examples of challenging rescues that you've personally have been involved in, and what the outcome was?**

Bernie – bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*). We were alerted to a bottlenose dolphin in Moreton Bay which had a severe fishing line entanglement injury to dorsal fin, both pectoral fins, tail fluke and mouth. After developing a plan with the Queensland Environment Department, we mounted one of the largest rescue operations in recent history and intervened to assist this animal.



We were able to catch and render care she needed on-site in Moreton Bay, however it was deemed that her injuries were too significant, and she was transferred into care at Sea World for further treatment. We conducted a full general anaesthesia, partial dorsal fin amputation and six weeks of intensive rehabilitation before the proud moment of returning Bernie back to where she was rescued from and happy to report we are still receiving sightings of her in the Moreton Bay region.

A Grey nurse shark with severe rope entanglement around the tail stock. We were alerted to this animal by local dive groups who saw this shark with a rope embedded in the tissue of its tail. It appeared weak, struggling to swim and severely underweight. The Sea World Foundation team mobilised a rescue response and headed out to Flat Rock off North Stradbroke Island. Fortunately working with weather windows etc., we were able to locate the animal, restrain the animal and bring it on board our larger Sea World 1 rescue vessel.

We conducted a thorough health assessment and provided treatment to the affected tail. This was all conducted on site in the field. The animal was shortly released and fitted with a tag for post release monitoring. We have since had reports from dive companies that the animal is doing well and from video footage provided, we can see visible improvements in its overall body condition and swimming capabilities.

These were two very successful cases where we were able to assist animals that had come unstuck due to human activity.

**When you bring injured marine wildlife back to Sea World's veterinary hospital, what sort of facilities do you have for their treatment and rehabilitation?**

We have a purpose-built facility that enables us to treat and rehabilitate all types of marine wildlife from a small silver gull right through to a large 700kgs rissos dolphin. Our hospital facilities consist of a series of rehabilitation pools with state-of-the-art life support systems that allow us to isolate each pool system if required. We have on-site diagnostics capabilities such as blood machines, ultrasound, xray and endoscopy. All of our diagnostic equipment is mobile allowing us capabilities to take on rescues and use remotely if required. We are a large team with a plethora of experiences that allows us to provide gold standard care from triage, intensive care, surgery/medicine and rehabilitation.

**How do you feel when you release a marine animal back into the wild where you have been involved in its rescue, treatment and healing?**

It might sound cliché but there are no words to describe the feeling of releasing an animal back into the wild. It is a mixed bag of pride, elation, comradery with a touch of anxiety and fear.

The wild is a scary place with increased human activity and environmental degradation, we are placing more and more pressure on marine wildlife. The fear and anxiety comes from the uncertainty of the future for that individual. If we have had to intervene once in its lifetime who is not to say it will require our assistance again.

**Does Sea World undertake rescues only around the Gold Coast, or can they operate further afield?**

Due to our location the majority of our rescues are focused around South-East Queensland and Northern New South Wales regions, however we have resources and capabilities to respond to marine rescues right across Australia. We have consulted and offered assistance internationally where required.



**The Sea World veterinary hospital is a valued member of the Wildlife Health Australia surveillance team. What sort of information is collected and shared among the nine participating zoo-based veterinary hospitals across Australia, and why is that important?**

There is a series of information that is collected from Sea World and Sea World Foundation operations and these largely consist of wildlife rehabilitation case load, infectious disease diagnosis and surveillance. More recently WHA and Sea World worked closely together to manage information from a humpback calf mortality event that occurred during last years' whale migration season.

Having WHA operate the surveillance program is integral in pooling all the firsthand information that Zoos collect through their wildlife rescue and rehabilitation work. Without collaborations like WHA and Sea World Foundation we would miss important wildlife health information, research opportunity and disease surveillance.

Links:

Wildlife Health Australia Sentinel Surveillance clinics:

<https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Our-Work/Surveillance/Sentinel-Surveillance>

Sea World Foundation rescue:

<https://seaworld.com.au/foundation/rescue>



Rescues with Dr Claire Madden, Head Veterinarian, Sea World Foundation. Sea World is an important surveillance partner of Wildlife Health Australia.

