



Underwater Parks Day at the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Photo Information: Divers amidst a spectacular kelp forest flourishing within the Anacapa Island State Marine Reserve. Photo by Nick Fash/Heal the Bay

Santa Monica, CA (December 29, 2009) – Heal the Bay’s Santa Monica Pier Aquarium will celebrate the second annual Underwater Parks Day from 12:30 to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 16, at the marine science center, 1600 Ocean Front Walk, beach level beneath the Santa Monica Pier.

Interactive displays at the Aquarium, explaining the importance of establishing undersea parks, called Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), complement the exhibits of more than 100 local marine species permanently displayed at the center. The day will include two presentations: the first at 1:00 p.m. reviews the on-going MPA process in Southern California, and at 3:00 p.m. a second discussion will focus on the benefits of MPAs to coral reefs in Belize. The announcement of the three winners of an underwater

photography contest is slated for 2:00 p.m., and contestants' work will be on display as well.

Daylong activities for visitors include a scavenger hunt, and a "sustainable seafood station," where the public can learn how to help protect the ocean and its resources by making sustainable choices in seafood selections at markets and restaurants.

Many local residents, marine biologists, divers, ocean conservationists and fisherman support the creation of marine protected areas along the Southern California coast because they agree marine protected areas are a critical tool in replenishing the fish populations and restoring the health of our coastal waters.

Santa Monica Pier Aquarium staff are collaborating with aquaria and marine science centers from as far north as Santa Barbara and as far south as La Jolla to present engaging exhibits, activities and materials about marine protected areas to be shared with visitors on Underwater Parks Day.

"Discussing common ocean education and literacy goals around a table with so many colleagues that I admire and have respected during my career is a great honor and a lot of fun," said Vicki Wawerchak, director of the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium.

Underwater Parks Day is also being celebrated at each of the following collaborating institutions: Cabrillo Marine Aquarium in San Pedro, Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, Ocean Institute in Dana Point, Birch Aquarium at Scripps in La Jolla, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's Ty Warner Sea Center and the SEA LIFE Aquarium in Carlsbad.

About the SMPA

The Santa Monica Pier Aquarium is Heal the Bay's marine education facility located beach-level, just below the Carousel, at the Santa Monica Pier. The Aquarium is open to the general public <<http://www.healthebay.org/smpa/visitor/hoursfees.asp>> and attracts more than 85,000 visitors per year. Since Heal the Bay acquired the Aquarium in 2003 from UCLA, more than 300,000 visitors have been welcomed during public hours and approximately 80,000 students have been educated during in-house education programs <<http://www.healthebay.org/smpa/edupgms/default.asp>> .

About Heal the Bay

Heal the Bay is a nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to making Southern California coastal waters and watersheds, including Santa Monica Bay, safe, healthy and clean. We use research, education, community action and advocacy to pursue our mission.