

## Letter to the Editor

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### 2015 Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks & Aquariums' Annual Meeting

On behalf of the AMMPA Board and accredited member facilities throughout the world, we congratulate *Aquatic Mammals* on your more than four decades of work to advance marine mammal science. We also thank Dr. Kathleen Dudzinski for updating us on the journal's impressive work at our 2015 Annual Meeting held April 15-17 in Arlington, Virginia.

Our meeting each year gives leaders of the marine mammal community of accredited AMMPA facilities throughout the world an opportunity to hear from regulators and other government officials, learn about the status of Alliance member-supported research, discuss proposed enhancements and updates to AMMPA's accreditation *Standards & Guidelines*, formally accept into the Alliance new member facilities that have passed Alliance accreditation inspections, hear from new member facilities interested in joining the Alliance, learn about the work of our 15 committees over the past year, receive updates on the work of our professional member organizations, and gain perspective from speakers outside of the marine mammal community.

This year, nine representatives from the U.S. National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service joined our meeting to discuss topics ranging from the ongoing California sea lion Unusual Mortality Event to efforts to prevent and mitigate marine debris. We also heard legislative and policy updates from members in Asia, Canada, the Caribbean, the European Union, Mexico, and the U.S. Attendees also learned about the development and challenges of aquariums in China from guests from a Chinese company with numerous facilities there.

Over the last several years, the Alliance has increased its advocacy efforts, including engagement with multinational environmental agreements. This year's meeting also included a panel discussion on the experiences of several

Alliance members who attended meetings of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Members also heard a presentation from a former U.S. congressman about why advocacy matters and how to be an effective advocate.

The meeting featured a number of sessions on communications-related topics, including a thought leader panel of experts from the community who are frequently interviewed by print, broadcast, and online media outlets and who shared their experiences trying to explain complex marine mammal science-related topics to the layman and to combat misinformation, all in the frequently compressed timeframe of 30-second sound bites. Attendees also heard from the author of a new book on the importance of language and trust in communicating ideas in an age of skeptics and the author of a new book on how the factors of velocity, volume, and venom on social media platforms have changed the rules of issue management today.

Because social media has made activism of all kinds faster, easier, and cheaper than ever before, it has become a permanent part of the operating environment for all industries and fields of endeavor. To lend perspective on the changing activism landscape, representatives from several non-marine-mammal, animal-related industries participated on a panel to share their experiences over the years navigating this environment and promoting science-based facts about their work. Attendees also heard presentations from the CEO of a prominent communications firm about new strategies to address activist commentary and from the Alliance Communications Committee chair about the millennials and how to educate them about marine mammals.

Two newly accredited members, Dolphin Cove Grand Cayman and Dolphin Discovery Play del Carmen, were welcomed into the Alliance at the meeting; five reaccreditations were recognized;

and five prospective facility members and one prospective professional member made presentations about their work.

The meeting was preceded by an Alliance Board and Committee Chair meeting and by visits to U.S. legislators' offices by more than 40 Alliance member representatives.

Meeting sponsors this year included Animal Necessity, Atlantic Pacific, Dolphin Connection, Dolphin Discovery, Georgia Aquarium, Gulf World, Gulfarium, McRoberts Sales Co., Mystic Aquarium, PGAV Destination Consultants, Pisces Seafood, Public Communications Inc., SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, Six Flags Discovery Kingdom, and The Nassal Company.

Thank you to *Aquatic Mammals* for the opportunity to provide this overview of our 2015 Annual Meeting.