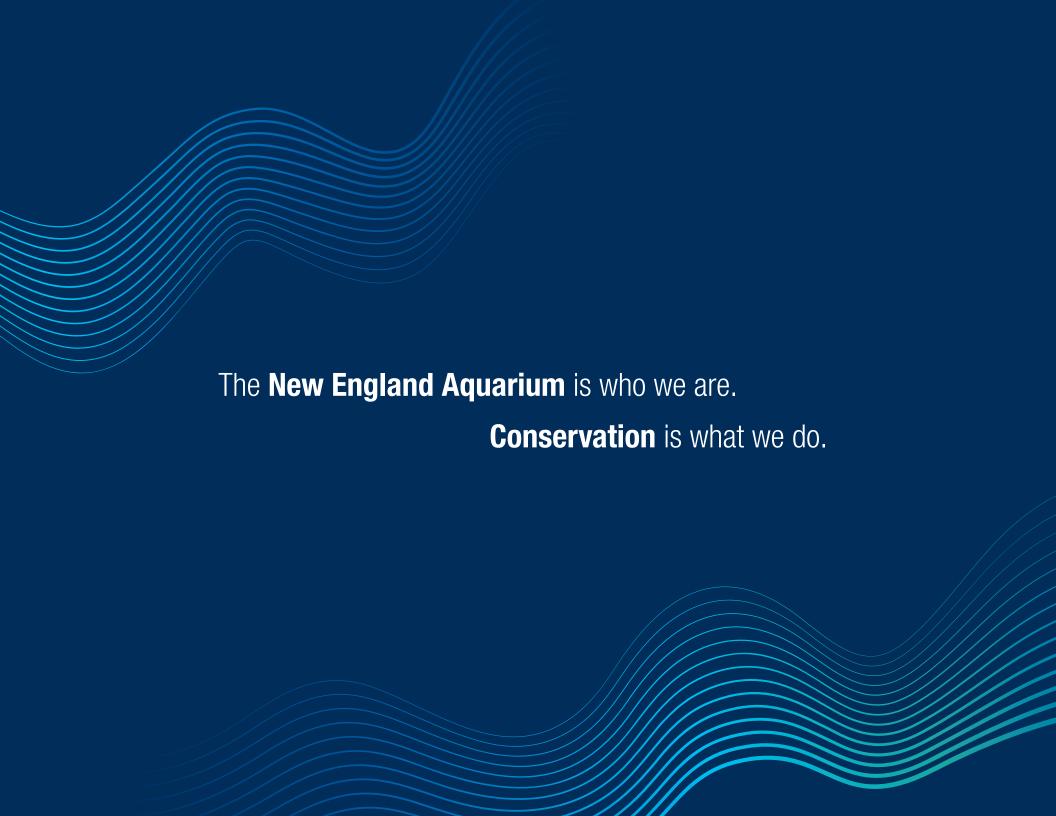


# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Protecting the blue planet





















# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

In 2023, we continued the great work of inspiring people to form a deeper connection to the ocean and take action to protect it, and we're pleased to share the highlights from such an eventful year in this report. With your support, we are advancing ocean conservation work in myriad areas.

We are upholding excellence in operations, animal welfare and management, veterinary medicine, and educational outreach. I'm proud to share that in 2023 we were once again recognized for this commitment with what is considered the "gold standard" accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

We are also conducting scientific research to drive ocean solutions through our dedicated research arm, the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life at the New England Aquarium. From conducting aerial surveys to implementing tools like satellite and acoustic tags, we are using innovative methods to study marine animal movement, behavior, and survival and help inform responsible use of the ocean and protections for threatened and endangered species.

Our Animal Care team works tirelessly to ensure the animals in our care are thriving, and the team celebrated the hatching of two new penguin chicks last year—a first since 2019. By participating in species survival plans and efforts to save animals from extinction, we are working to improve animal well-being here at the Aquarium and in the wild.

We are also continuing to forge partnerships at the local, state, and federal levels; help create informed, inclusive, and resilient communities; and expand public and youth programming to develop future ocean stewards and advocates. By hosting

events like the first Right Whale Day in Massachusetts and the Marine Conservation Action Fund's Fellows Summit, we are inspiring communities near and far to connect with marine conservation initiatives.

Our work to protect the blue planet is not possible without you. Your contributions are instrumental in advancing our mission of protecting the ocean and its inhabitants.

Thank you for your trust and continued support!

When Wormell Thomas

Sincerely.

Vikki N. Spruill
President and CEO

Thomas R. Burton III
Chair of the Board of Trustees





# Sperm whale and calf spotted by the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life's aerial survey team during an October 2023 flight over the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument.

# **Our Conservation Work**

Welcoming new animals into our care, educating our visitors to become better ocean stewards, conducting impactful research, and supporting the growth of a responsible blue economy are just a few of the ways we continued to protect the blue planet in 2023 thanks to your support.

# STUDYING AND PROTECTING

# **Committed to Excellence Within the Zoo and Aquarium Industry**

Following a rigorous application process and inspection, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) renewed our accreditation in 2023. Considered the gold standard, AZA is an organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal well-being, education, and science. It is an international accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums, representing over 235 facilities, which collectively draw more than 200 million visitors a year.

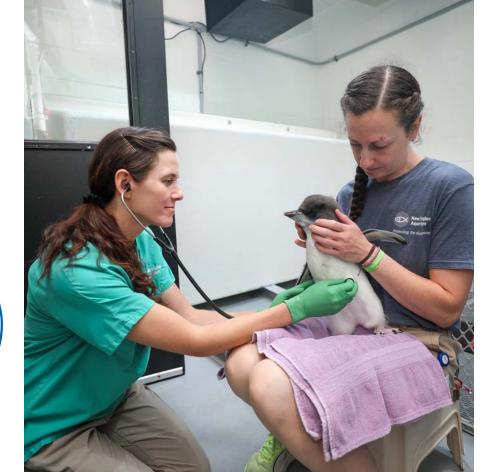
Additionally, members of the Aquarium's team also lend their expertise to a number of AZA committees and industry efforts, including animal well-being and sustainability initiatives, conservation programs, and the accreditation process as inspectors.

ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS





Top: New England Aquarium in Boston. Bottom: Staff at the Aquarium's Sea Turtle Hospital in Quincy, MA, uphold standards of excellence in animal care. Photos: Vanessa Kahn



Top: African penguin chick Bray during a check-in. Bottom: Bray hatched in May 2023. Photos: Vanessa Kahn

# STUDYING AND PROTECTING

# Protecting Penguins in Our Care and in the Wild

The thriving penguin colony at the Aquarium welcomed two baby chicks last year for the first time since 2019. The hatching of the two little ones is part of a Species Survival Plan (SSP). To help protect and restore endangered African and vulnerable southern rockhopper penguin populations, the Aquarium and several other AZA-accredited institutions participate in the SSP—a breeding program that aspires to produce a genetically diverse and sustainable population. African penguin chick Bray, born to parents Malgas II and Demersus III, came into the world on March 23, while southern rockhopper chick Poa hatched to parents Pebble II and Fuego II on June 23.

In 2023, we also proudly joined an international effort to protect and restore wild African penguin populations. Founded in 2015, AZA's Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) initiative aims to focus the expertise, resources, and audience of its member institutions toward efforts to protect and recover species in need. Already a member of other SAFE programs, we became a SAFE African Penguin program partner to support a species that could go extinct by 2035 without intervention. In our unique colony of nearly 40 African penguins, more than half of the population exceeds the average lifespan of the species in their natural environment.

Through these partnerships, we are committed to promoting educational opportunities for guests engaging with the penguin habitat, continuing breeding plans to promote the responsible and sustainable population management of the species, and participating in field conservation work.



Scan the QR code to meet African penguin Bray!

# SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION

# **Meet Volunteer Alan Marshall**

For Alan Marshall, Tuesdays at the Aquarium start with 30 pounds of raw fish. A longtime supporter and member of the Giving Society, Alan has been volunteering in the Giant Ocean Tank since 2018. He assists with meal preparation, feedings, chores, and greeting guests.

"That's the part that really brings me out of my shell," jokes Alan, who is well known among staff for his sense of humor.

Alan traces his connection to the Aquarium back to childhood, when his parents brought him to see the dolphins. He and his wife became members as their own family grew, and he enjoyed the events so much that he decided to volunteer. When asked what motivates him, he says:

"It's so fun, the people are so friendly, and it's a great place to go and spend a day, from beginning to end. And you get to help the community and the planet in some small way, which makes it very enjoyable."

Conservation has long been top of mind for Alan, who has been a member of the SCUBA community for the past 20 years. But the Aquarium helped him dive deeper into the challenges facing the blue planet, from sustainable fishing practices to biodiversity loss.

"When you go to the Aquarium, there's always a conservation message," he explains. "It's helped me become more involved."



Alan Marshall volunteers at the Giant Ocean Tank. Photo: Vanessa Kahn

This focus on conservation, especially efforts to study and protect species like sea turtles, drives him to support the Aquarium in many ways and keeps him coming back every Tuesday.

"The work they do at the turtle hospital-rescuing and rehabilitating sea turtles—really resonates with me," he says.

That, and the opportunity to dive with all the animals that call the Giant Ocean Tank home.

"It's the best diving in New England."

# **ADVISING AND PARTNERING**

# Supporting the Growth of a Responsible Blue Economy

Last year, we continued our work to support the growth of a responsible blue economy through legislation and partnerships.

We crafted legislation addressing issues impacting the blue economy sector, such as ocean conservation science, equitable blue workforce development, the circular economy transition, and "blue carbon" sequestration, alongside state lawmakers Senator Susan Moran (D-Falmouth), Representative Jessica Giannino (D-Revere), and Representative Kathleen LaNatra (D-Kingston). We also endorsed bills reintroduced by Senator Julian Cyr (D-Truro), Representative Dylan Fernandes (D-Falmouth), then Representative Josh Cutler (D-Plymouth), and Representative Patrick Kearney (D-Scituate) that help mitigate the impacts of ocean acidification on marine ecosystems and the blue economy, as well as support fisheries transitioning to using on-demand fishing gear that helps protect marine life while enabling the fishing industry to thrive.

In addition, the Aquarium continued to support early stage entrepreneurship in blue technology through BlueSwell. This partnership with SeaAhead, Inc., helps the creation and growth of startup companies with the potential to impact ocean sustainability. The fourth BlueSwell cohort was selected last fall. Members received funding and spent six months receiving individualized guidance from the Aquarium's Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life, SeaAhead, and other advisors. Each year, the program wraps up with a presentation of the entrepreneurs' refined projects at "Demo Day."

Also in 2023, we introduced Upswell, a capacity-building program focused on expanding angel investment in blue technology startups. The program—another partnership between the Aquarium and SeaAhead—hosted potential investors at a fall event to introduce its first whitepaper, "Aquafeed Innovation: Investment Opportunities for Responsible Aquaculture," which is now available online.





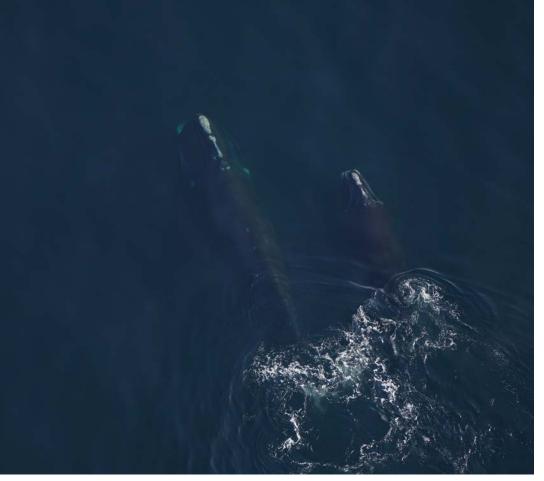
Top: Rep. Josh Cutler, Rep. Joan Meschino, Rep. Kip Diggs, Alison Rogers Cove, Rep. Jessica Giannino, Rep. Kathy LaNatra, Vikki Spruill, Sen. Susan L. Moran, Rep. Dylan Fernandes, and Rep. Ted Philips. Bottom: Robert Huber of Radmantis, a member of BlueSwell's third cohort, demonstrates their Al-enhanced fish management solution. Photos: Vanessa Kahn and Jonathan Clancy



# **Informing Protections for the Ocean and Marine Animals**

Throughout the year, our Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life aerial survey team conducts surveys over New England waters, from off the south coast of Cape Cod to the Gulf of Maine. Their critical work helps inform protections for the ocean and its inhabitants. The team's sightings of right whales often trigger or extend Dynamic Management Areas, with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issuing advisories for boaters to voluntarily slow to 10 knots or less. This summer, the aerial survey team also conducted flights over the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, sighting many marine animals, including fin and pilot whales; striped, Risso's, common, and bottlenose dolphins; and Chilean devil rays. It's the first marine national monument in the US Atlantic Ocean, designated by President Barack Obama in 2016. The Anderson Cabot Center's research has contributed to protections associated with the monument and continues to highlight the biodiversity of the area and the monument's environmental significance.

In June 2023, Dr. Jessica Redfern, who is the associate vice president of ocean conservation science at the Anderson Cabot Center, testified at a Congressional hearing examining the impacts of NOAA's proposed changes to the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule. Since vessel strikes are the leading cause of death for the critically endangered species, Dr. Redfern cited Anderson Cabot Center research to support changes that would slow vessels and expand existing regulations to help protect North Atlantic right whales.





Top: Right whale mother Pediddle (Catalog #1012) and her calf photographed by our aerial survey team. Bottom: Dr. Jessica Redfern testifies at a Congressional hearing. Photos: New England Aquarium

# **EDUCATING AND INSPIRING**

# Tracking Rehabilitated Sea Turtles, Live and Online

In 2023, members of the Sea Turtle Hospital staff and researchers from the Anderson Cabot Center tagged a record 14 rehabilitated sea turtles out of the 518 cold-stunned patients treated in our facility throughout the fall and winter. Information from satellite tags is used to improve sea turtle welfare and conservation, helping our researchers fill critical knowledge gaps about the turtles' habitat use, migrations, nesting patterns, and more.

The milestone coincided with the launch of our live, online Sea Turtle Tracker, allowing the public to follow the journeys of the tagged turtles after their return to the ocean. An interactive map on our website displays tracked locations of sea turtles that were rehabilitated and released last summer, including critically endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles named Farfalle and Ziti, whose satellite tags returned data for around 150 days each, tracking the turtles' movements from Cape Cod all the way to the Carolinas.

In addition to the rehabilitated sea turtles, several leatherback turtles were tagged in May 2023 as part of a collaboration between Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life researcher Dr. Kara Dodge and Marine Conservation Action Fund project leader Luis Crespo in Puerto Rico. The Sea Turtle Tracker shows three of these sea turtles' movements over thousands of miles, with tags still returning data as late as March 2024.



Scan the QR code to see our turtle tracker!





Top: A Kemp's ridley sea turtle is released in Cape Cod following recovery at our Sea Turtle Hospital. Bottom: Researchers tag leatherback turtles on nesting beaches. Photos: Vanessa Kahn and Dr. Kara Dodge

## SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION

# **Meet Supporter Ruth Spencer**

For 45 years, Ruth Spencer has been a steadfast member and supporter of the Aquarium.

"My grandfather lived south of Boston, and we stayed with him while my father was deployed overseas," she says. "He took us to the Aquarium right after it opened."

Those visits sparked Ruth's interest in marine biology. Shortly after, the family moved to England, where her father was an Air Force officer. Local children's programs introduced Ruth to Jacques Cousteau and Australia's Great Barrier Reef, and she was hooked.

"We came home to the States and I said: 'I'm going to be a marine biologist," Ruth recalls. She later realized it wasn't quite the right career fit.

"I am a very good accountant, but I'm a miserable marine biologist," Ruth says with a laugh. "But my love never stopped, and I figured if I can't be a marine biologist, at least I can give money."

And that's exactly what she did. Ruth gives to honor her memories, her love of the ocean, and for all the Aquarium does to protect the blue planet.

"If we don't keep our ocean safe and clean, and our marine animals protected, I don't know what future generations are going to do," Ruth says. "I think the Aquarium is doing vital work, trying to reverse the



Ruth Spencer is a longtime member and supporter of the New England Aguarium. Photo courtesy of Ruth Spencer.

damage that's being done, from saving turtles to researching right whales. I provide support because I believe in what they're doing."

Ruth also gives back by introducing the next generation of her family to the Aquarium and the importance of caring for the ocean, just as her grandfather did with her.

"I took my young cousins to the Aquarium when they were little, and one went on to study marine biology and the other became an environmental conservationist. I like to think I had a little bit to do with that."



Top: Visitors support the protection of North Atlantic right whales during Massachusetts Right Whale Day. Bottom: Visitors pose for a photo in front of an inflatable right whale. Photos: Vanessa Kahn

# **EDUCATING AND INSPIRING**

# Raising Awareness on the First-ever Right Whale Day

The Aguarium was proud to support the establishment of the first Massachusetts Right Whale Day on April 24, 2023. The holiday was officially recognized thanks to the advocacy work of South Shore native Matt Delaney, who "fell in love" with right whales after a moving sighting made a lasting impression.

Delaney contacted then Representative Josh Cutler (D-Plymouth) to share his idea for what he called "Whale Day." Representative Cutler became the lead sponsor of the legislation to establish the day, working alongside Delaney and state Senator Susan Moran (D-Falmouth) and with support from our policy staff. Before leaving office, then Governor Charlie Baker officially designated April 24 as Right Whale Day in the Commonwealth.

This newly minted holiday helps bring awareness to the plight of North Atlantic right whales, of which there are an estimated 360 remaining. More than 40 years of research from our Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life shows that human impacts, especially entanglement and vessel strikes, pose a serious threat to the species. At an event for Right Whale Day hosted at the Aquarium, policymakers and advocates, including Delaney, Representative Cutler, and Aquarium President and CEO Vikki Spruill, addressed a crowd gathered in the Harbor Tent. There was also a demonstration of ropeless fishing gear, which would help prevent whale entanglements. Inside the Aguarium, staff invited visitors to take action to protect right whales, signing postcards to send to legislators asking for their support of protection for these critically endangered animals.

# **ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING**

# **Expanded Youth Programs Develop Next Generation of Ocean Stewards**

2023 kicked off a reimagining of our youth programs with the goal of fostering deeper engagement through our newly developed Conservation Learning department. These changes offer our teens more hands-on learning experiences—such as environmental stewardship trips to Spectacle Island—and opportunities for social, civic, and political engagement.

The refreshed programs include our ClimaTeens and our teen internships. Our teen internship program is the longest-running paid teen program among US aquariums, with more than 2,500 students participating since its inception in 1992.

This past June, our ClimaTeens attended Capitol Hill Ocean Week through a program called Sea Youth Rise Up, which empowers and mobilizes young people to advocate for the ocean. While there, they watched Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life scientist Dr. Jessica Redfern's Congressional testimony on NOAA's proposed changes to the federal vessel strike reduction rule, as well as met with White House staff from the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs and the Council on Environmental Quality within the Executive Office of the President.





Top: ClimaTeens meeting National Geographic Young Explorer Sruthi Gurudev (center) before an event at the Aquarium. Bottom: Teen interns visit Spectacle Island in Boston Harbor for environmental stewardship trips. Photos: Dave Lee and Steffani Ruf



Top: MCAF Fellows met with visitors at the Aquarium to discuss ocean conservation. Bottom: Fellows present at a two-day symposium during the MCAF Summit. Photos: Vanessa Kahn

# **ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING**

# Connecting a Global Community of **Conservationists**

Since its inception in 1999, our Marine Conservation Action Fund (MCAF) has supported more than 200 locally-led conservation initiatives in low- and middleincome countries across the globe. In 2023, MCAF added to that impact, disbursing just over \$220,000 to 20 projects in 15 countries. Projects supported by these grants include work to increase ocean literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean, aid indigenous marine management practices in the Philippines, develop specialized training in Ghana, advance species knowledge through data collection in Nigeria and Indonesia, and help institute a dynamic coastal management plan in Mexico.

Additionally, this past fall, program brought together 11 fellows for the second MCAF Summit in Boston. The summit showcased the innovation and entrepreneurship of our MCAF Fellows, with two public symposiums at the Simons Theatre and a "Global Conservation Day," during which MCAF Fellows shared their work with visitors in the Aquarium's exhibit halls, among other events throughout the week. Altogether, the successful event underscored the vital role our MCAF Fellows play as members of the Aquarium's global conservation community. We continue to offer new development and funding opportunities to our MCAF Fellows to help further their impact, thanks in part to a transformational gift from donors Alan and Lisa Dynner in 2022.



Scan the QR code to learn more about the MCAF Fellows!

## SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION

# **Meet Member Josh Danoff**

On a cold January evening, one of the Aquarium's more elusive inhabitants made an appearance at exactly the right time.

"We had never seen it," says Josh Danoff, co-owner of Union Square Donuts, who was attending a member event with his daughter, Josephine. They noticed a crowd of people and realized what had drawn the onlookers: the giant Pacific octopus.

"At one point, we just looked at each other, and we were both speechless," he says with a smile.

Visits to the Aquarium are part of a weekly routine that allows Josh and Josephine to spend time together at special places around Boston.

"As soon as I could get my daughter in the stroller, we took some trips to the Aquarium," Josh recalls. The family became members so they could regularly enjoy exhibits like the Trust Family Foundation Shark and Ray Touch Tank, which was Josephine's favorite. These interactions are why he continues to support the Aquarium today.

"Not everyone gets to go scuba diving or out on a boat, but at the Aquarium, you're up close with animals, fish, and sea turtles that are outside of your everyday experience," he says.

Now, these moments have become even more important.



Josh Danoff and his family. Photo courtesy of Josh Danoff.

"Three years ago, my youngest daughter, Matilda, was diagnosed with cancer, so our lives basically changed that day," Josh says.

While Matilda is currently stable and doing well, ongoing care and doctor's visits take a toll on the family's schedule—and on the time Mom and Dad have to spend with Josephine. That's why Josh continues to support and visit the Aquarium, and looks forward to attending future events.

"We had visited countless times before, but this seemed just a little different," he says. "And that's the goal for Josephine and me. Our days together don't have to be extraordinary, they just have to be a little extra ordinary, a little bit different than what we do every day."

# Thank you to our supporters.

The New England Aquarium gratefully acknowledges the individuals, foundations, and corporations whose generous financial contributions provided critical support allowing us to care for thousands of animals, power conservation research, and inspire audiences of all ages.

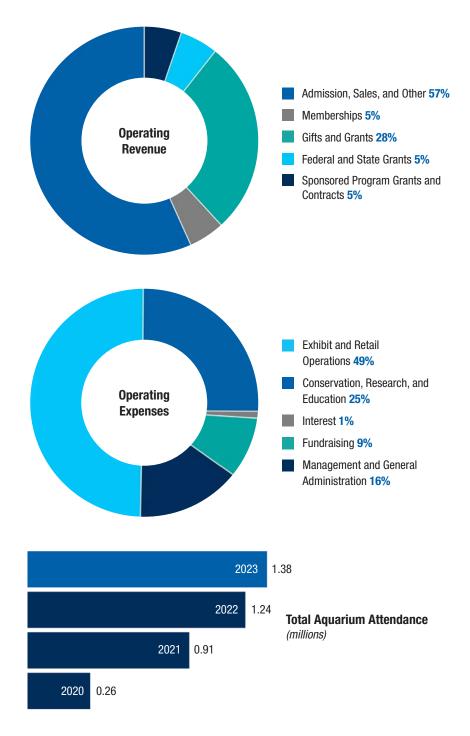
As a nonprofit organization, philanthropic support enables us to take action for our ocean. In a conscious effort to live blue and reduce our paper use, we are moving our donor listing to a digital format. Please scan the QR code below or visit neaq.org/AR2023 for a list of donors who contributed \$500 or above in 2023. We thank you for helping us to protect the blue planet!





# FINANCIAL RESULTS (in thousands of dollars)

Operating Revenue and Support	FY 2023	FY 2022
Admissions – Individuals and Groups	\$29,661	\$26,642
Retail Sales – Food, Gift Shop, and Events	5,221	4,455
Memberships – Individual, Family, and Corporate	3,236	2,846
Gifts and Grants	17,440	12,626
Federal and State Grants	3,408	11,200
Sponsored Program Grants and Contracts	3,310	3,454
Other	1,045	844
Total Operating Revenue and Support	\$63,321	\$62,067
Operating Costs and Expenses		
Research, Conservation, and Education	\$13,455	\$9,660
Exhibit and Retail Operations	26,853	23,938
Management and General Administration	8,357	7,455
Fundraising	4,730	3,517
Interest	524	660
Total Operating Costs and Expenses	\$53,919	\$45,230
Net Assets from Operations	\$9,402	\$16,837
Non-operating Revenues and Expenses		
Non-operating Revenues	\$418	\$560
Investment Return (Loss)	4,081	(2,286)
Not Change in Daneficial Interest in Dernatual Trust	450	(510)
Net Change in Beneficial Interest in Perpetual Trust	152	(510)
Increase in Net Assets	\$14,053	\$14,601
Increase in Net Assets	\$14,053	\$14,601



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We would like to honor the memory of the following Aquarium board members, volunteers, and donors who passed away in 2023 and 2024.

Richard A. Soden, Esq. Susan T. Strauss



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The following donors have committed \$1 million or more cumulatively, since the New England Aquarium's opening in 1969.

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