



TWO BELUGA WHALES PREPARE FOR RELEASE INTO THE WORLD'S FIRST OPEN WATER SANCTUARY

- *SEA LIFE Trust confirms two beluga whales, Little Grey and Little White, will be moved into the world's first open water whale sanctuary in June*
- *New exclusive ITV documentary will show Little Grey and Little White's epic journey back home to the ocean with comedian and animal lover John Bishop*

06th May 2020: Two former captive whales will return home to the ocean when they are released into the world's first open water sanctuary for beluga whales in Iceland this June.

The charity SEA LIFE Trust has today confirmed that belugas, Little Grey and Little White, are in their final stages of preparation and ready to be moved from their temporary landside care facility to the large sanctuary in a natural bay just off the island Heimaey, one of the Westman Islands, located off the south coast of Iceland.

The Sanctuary, which is the first of its kind, was built with the support of a generous donation from Merlin Entertainments.

For the past 12 months, Little Grey and Little White's health and well-being has been closely monitored by a team of experts and veterinarians following their epic 6,000 mile relocation by air, land and sea from an aquarium in China to start a new life in Iceland.

Since their safe arrival to the island, the whales have been acclimatising and preparing for their return to a more natural habitat. This has included adding more blubber ready for the cool sub-Arctic water, as well as being introduced to the different flora and fauna they will experience in the bay and ensuring they are comfortable with the logistical methods needed for the move.

Andy Bool, Head of SEA LIFE Trust, said: *"Little Grey and Little White have made amazing progress since arriving safely to the beluga whale sanctuary last year and we're really pleased to say they are now ready to be moved into their new open water home.*

"This is a complex marine welfare project and our care team of world-leading experts have always been led by the individual needs of Little Grey and Little White. With current lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic due to be eased in the coming weeks across Iceland, it's right that we make the best decision for Little Grey and Little White and move them into their new home.

"We'll continue to carefully monitor their health and well-being, as well as the ongoing situation and Icelandic weather closely, ahead of the planned move in June."

The move from their landside care facility on the island of Heimaey to the secluded Klettsvik Bay which measures approximately 32,000 sqm with a depth of up to 10m, marks the final chapter in Little Grey and Little White amazing journey back to the ocean. The full story of their journey from China over the last year will be told by John Bishop in an exclusive, new ITV documentary, produced by Plimsoll Productions to be shown later this year.

John Bishop said of his experience working with the SEA LIFE Trust Beluga Whale Sanctuary project: *"This has been one of the best experiences of my life. Meeting Little White and Little Grey in Shanghai last April and following their journey, which has been far from straightforward, has been a real eye opener about the challenges faced by these animals and the dedicated people who are working to give them a better life. This is a film about hope, despair, disappointment, tenacity, realism and dreams and as I write this I still don't know truly how it will end."*

Created in partnership with global marine wildlife charity, Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* is one of the biggest developments in captive whale and dolphin care and protection in decades and the first of its kind to be created for cetaceans.

For more information about the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* or to make a donation, visit www.sealifetrust.org.

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For further information please contact at Andrew Boocock at Stripe Communications on 07855795403 or email: belugasanctuary@stripecommunications.com

Notes to Editors:

How will Little Grey and Little White be moved from their temporary landside facility on the island of Heimaey to Klettsvik Bay?

The complex challenge of transferring two beluga whales a short distance (which normally takes around 7-10 minutes by boat) to their new open water sanctuary home is being carefully planned by a team of experts with experience in caring for marine mammals.

1. The whales will be safely transferred from the landside care facility in specially designed slings with custom foam matting for cushioning during transportation using a truck and the harbour's tugboat each with a crane.
2. The belugas' care team, along with local assistance, will be with the whales during the duration of the move. It is estimated the move will take up to an hour with each whale to be moved individually. They will be kept cool and damp using misters.
3. Having reached the bay, the whales will first be released into their sea sanctuary care pools which include three pools, 9.6m wide and up to 2.5m deep. These sea sanctuary care pools are designed for monitoring the whales and providing veterinary care during a period of acclimatistion.

4. After monitoring the belugas in this space, underwater gates will be opened to allow Little Grey and Little White into two additional sea care pools for further acclimatisation.
5. The time period in the care pools will be determined by the whales' health and well-being with a 24 hour watch for a period of time before the whales are assessed to be released into their new home, Klettsvik Bay, which measures approximately 32,000 sqm with a depth of up to 10m.

About SEA LIFE TRUST

SEA LIFE TRUST is a registered charity (no. 1175859) working globally to protect the world's oceans and the amazing marine life that lives within them. Our vision is of a world where our seas are healthy, protected and full of diverse life. We own and operate marine wildlife sanctuaries, run inspiring conservation campaigns and fund projects and education programmes that champion the need for plastic-free oceans, sustainable fishing, effective Marine Protected Areas and an end to over-exploitation of marine life. www.sealifetrust.org

About Merlin Entertainments

Merlin Entertainments is a global leader in location-based, family entertainment. As Europe's Number 1 and the world's second-largest visitor attraction operator, Merlin now operates over 130 attractions, 20 hotels and 6 holiday villages in 25 countries and across 4 continents. Merlin's purpose is to deliver memorable experiences to its 67 million guests around the world, through its iconic brands and multiple attraction formats, and the commitment and passion of its c.28,000 employees (peak season). www.merlinentertainments.biz

About WDC

WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation is the leading charity dedicated to the protection of whales and dolphins, working globally through campaigns, lobbying, advising governments, conservation projects, field research, rescue, education and much more. WDC operates through offices in the UK, North America, Germany and Australia. Our vision is a world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free. www.whales.org

About SEA LIFE

SEA LIFE is the world's largest family of aquariums. From its origins in 1979 in Oban, Scotland, SEA LIFE now provides immersive marine experiences in nearly 50 locations in 17 countries around the world. We aim to share our passion for the creatures of the oceans and to make our guests fall in love with them. www.visitsealife.com

Plimsoll Productions – making the documentary

Plimsoll Productions creates and produces non-scripted content from its offices in Bristol, Cardiff and Los Angeles. The creative team has produced many hits and won Baftas, Emmys and RTS awards. In little more than five years, the company has secured orders for more than 50 series, working for clients in the US, UK and Canada. Completed shows and formats are sold all over the world: Plimsoll controls distribution after acquiring a significant stake in Magnify Media. The company is now one of the fastest growing UK indies and already one of the largest: it's currently listed as 3rd in the annual Broadcast survey of true indies. We believe that diversity of talent, thought and experience are key

elements of the creative process and we aim to promote equality, respect and inclusiveness across the company.

<http://www.plimsollproductions.com/>

