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SENATOR ILEANA GARCIA

36th District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Senator Garcia and Representative Cross File the “MANTA” Protection Act to Protect Endangered or Threatened Marine Animals

MIAMI, FL– Senator Ileana Garcia (R-Miami) and Representative Lindsay Cross (D-St. Petersburg) filed [SB 988](#) and [HB 1171](#), known as the “MANTA Protection Act,” which would prohibit the collection and transport of endangered or threatened marine animal species from Florida waters for education or exhibition purposes.

This past summer, the public was outraged after seeing a video of a giant manta ray being captured off the coast of Panama City and ultimately transferred to SeaWorld Abu Dhabi for permanent public display. In response, legislators from the U.S. House of Representatives, the Florida State Senate, and the Florida State House of Representatives sent letters to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Commissioners requesting changes to the issuance of Special Activity Licenses for education or exhibition purposes. This bill outlines needed reforms to that program and seeks to prioritize the protection of threatened and endangered marine animal species over corporate profit.

“This bill is vital for protecting our endangered and vulnerable aquatic species. Banning the capture and export of these animals, we’re taking essential steps to preserve our marine ecosystems for generations to come,” stated **Senator Ileana Garcia**.

“Florida’s endangered and threatened marine animals deserve to live their lives in their natural habitat. The viral video showing the capture of a giant manta ray exposed a dangerous practice: the state-authorized collection and transport of endangered or threatened marine animal species from Florida waters. The public’s outrage shows that we cannot stand by and allow these animals to be taken from their natural habitat solely for exhibition. This bill would reform the permitting process that allows this practice and refocus our efforts on conservation and restoration of these animals,” said **Representative Lindsay Cross**.

REPLY TO:

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BEN ALBRITTON
President of the Senate

JASON BRODEUR
President Pro Tempore

“The MANTA Protection Act closes a troubling loophole that has allowed marine animals listed under the Endangered Species Act to be captured in Florida waters for public display, despite federal protections,” said **Alicia Prygoski, Strategic Legislative Affairs Manager at the Animal Legal Defense Fund.** “These animals endure severe suffering when removed from their natural habitats and confined to small aquariums for entertainment—practices that also place already vulnerable populations at even greater risk. We are grateful to Representative Lindsay Cross and Senator Ileana Garcia for introducing this critical bill, which will help ensure endangered and threatened marine species are protected for years to come.”

"Representative Cross and Senator Garcia’s decisive action to close a legislative loophole that allows for the capture and sale of Florida’s listed threatened marine wildlife is cause for celebration," said **Katherine Sayler, Southeast Representative with Defenders of Wildlife.** "Florida is a leader in protecting our native marine species, such as the iconic giant manta ray, which is threatened by overutilization and international trade. Rep. Cross and Sen. Garcia’s bill will reduce pressure on these animals in Florida’s waters and support their recovery."

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