
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE

NEWS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

NATIONAL
OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION

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NOAA-03-R118
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 19, 2004

**MORE THAN 60 BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS DIE IN UNUSUAL MORTALITY EVENT
IN FLORIDA**
***NOAA Fisheries Gets Preliminary Tests Results: Cause of Mortality Still A
Mystery***

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) released preliminary tests results today, taken from dead bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and sea water samples in St. Joseph's Bay in Florida. The preliminary tests indicate no evidence of *Karenia brevis*, the harmful algae commonly found in red tides in the Gulf of Mexico, in the in-shore water. However, the water samples did show *Pseudo-nitzschia* (species not yet identified) which is another harmful algae, specifically a diatom. In addition, preliminary results show domoic acid (a biotoxin produced by *Pseudo-nitzschia*) and brevetoxin (a biotoxin produced by *Karenia brevis*) in samples from the dolphins. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"Right now we have a tremendous number of people helping with the investigation on the beaches collecting samples, running tests, collecting satellite imagery to track blooms and guide water sampling," said Dr. Teri Rowles, NOAA Fisheries veterinarian and team lead for this event. "There has been an overwhelmingly positive response from other federal agencies, state and private partners, and the public to assist."

More than 60 dolphins have died in St. Joseph's Bay and the surrounding area in Florida since March 10. NOAA Fisheries declared an *Unusual Mortality Event* for the panhandle on March 17 upon receiving a recommendation from the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events.

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The latest figures for dead animals is more than 60 dolphins, numerous fish, jellies and invertebrates. NOAA Fisheries has teams of scientists from various organizations on the beaches and in the labs taking samples, conducting necropsies on the dead animals and analyzing tissue samples. NOAA Fisheries is still waiting for further information to learn whether they are dealing with one or two toxins, and to learn whether or not there are other predisposing factors.

NOAA Fisheries will continue working with our partners, including the National Ocean Service, Florida State Parks and the Florida Marine Research Institute.

The state of Florida also is monitoring the situation for public health and safety. According to state officials, the shellfish harvesting area in the immediate vicinity of St. Joseph's Bay has been temporarily closed since November 19, 2003 due to the biotoxin *Karenia breve*. Therefore, no commercial or recreational harvesting of shellfish is allowed.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's Fisheries - <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>