



# NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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## **NOAA FISHERIES CAUTIONS TO KEEP APPROPRIATE DISTANCE FROM MARINE MAMMALS**

A juvenile bottlenose dolphin recently spotted off of St. Helena Islands received the attention of people throughout the Low Country. This dolphin resembles "Carolina Snowball," a famous albino dolphin that was well known around South Carolina and Georgia in the 1950s and early 1960s. While many would like to take a closer look at this new dolphin, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service cautions that everyone needs to keep a safe and appropriate distance from all marine mammals and not interfere with their activities in any way.

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for enforcing the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, which safeguards whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, sea lions, walruses, manatees, sea otters and polar bears in U.S. waters and territories. Under the MMPA and its implementing regulations, it is illegal for people to "harass" or feed any marine mammal in the wild. Harassment is specifically defined in the MMPA as any act of pursuit, torment or annoyance that has the potential to injure the animals or disturb their behavior. Feeding or attempting to feed wild marine mammals is also explicitly prohibited.

"We must be careful stewards of our nation's environment," said William T. Hogarth, Ph.D., NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries. "NOAA Fisheries Service is committed to safeguarding the wildlife in our oceans and coasts for the benefit of everyone."

NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement reminds people to admire dolphins from a safe distance of no less than 50 yards to help ensure the animals are not harassed. Violations of the MMPA can result in maximum civil penalties of \$12,000 and maximum criminal fines of up to \$20,000 and jail time. The minimum penalty for a violation is \$200.

"Please treat wild marine mammals with caution and respect," said Enforcement Officer Gino Freselli, NOAA Fisheries Service - Southeastern Division. "For your safety and the safety of the animal, please do not closely approach, feed, touch or swim with wild marine mammals. They can bite when they are angry, frustrated or afraid. View and admire them from a safe distance, but please do not attempt to interact with them."

Freselli recommends calling the NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement Hotline at 800-853-1964 if a violation of the MMPA is observed.

NOAA Fisheries' primary mission is to protect and conserve our nation's living marine resources - this includes most species of marine mammals (whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals and sea lions). Additional information about NOAA Fisheries Service's marine mammal viewing guidelines and regulations can be found at:  
[www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/viewing.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/viewing.htm)

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, 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 the nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

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

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