



Contact: Kim Amendola
727-551-5707

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Mar. 11, 2009

“Don’t Feed Wild Dolphins” Says New Public Service Announcement
Illegal feeding harms both animals and humans

“Just stop feeding me!” says an animated dolphin in a new public service announcement released today that highlights the dangers of dolphins getting hooked on human handouts. The PSA was produced by a coalition of government agencies and private organizations.

The PSA reminds viewers that feeding wild dolphins is not only illegal, it is harmful to dolphins, even causing some to rely on begging for food from humans, upsetting their natural role as hunters and altering their diets. Feeding wild dolphins is a threat to humans, too. Dolphins sometimes become aggressive when seeking food and are known to bite when teased.

“Feeding wild dolphins triggers a domino effect of harmful behaviors as dolphins learn to associate people with food and free handouts,” said Stacey Horstman, bottlenose dolphin conservation coordinator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “We are at a point where we honestly need to change our behavior so we don’t change theirs, and we hope this PSA provides a compelling plea for the public’s help.”

The health and welfare of wild dolphins is severely compromised when humans feed them. Human-fed dolphins change their normal wild behavior and run a greater risk of being injured by boats, becoming entangled in fishing gear, or ingesting dangerous items such as fishing hooks and contaminated food. Some dolphins have become so accustomed to receiving routine handouts, they are now taking fishing bait and catches from recreational and commercial fishermen. In one recent instance off the Florida panhandle, a bottlenose dolphin distracted by taking fish from a recreational fisherman was attacked by a large shark.

Many scientists have observed illegal dolphin feeding throughout the southeast, especially since NOAA’s Fisheries Service prohibited feeding of wild marine mammals in 1993 under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Wild dolphin experts were also alerted to this problem through routine complaints from concerned citizens viewing the illegal behavior, and most recently through new videos posted to YouTube showing people feeding wild dolphins off Florida and South Carolina.

“Scientists have known for years that dolphin feeding was a problem in certain hotspot areas in the southeast,” said Laura Engleby, NOAA’s Fisheries Service southeast marine mammal branch chief. “But the citizen complaints and self-implicating Internet media has shocked our experts and further validates that feeding is an increasing and more wide-spread problem than we thought.”

Feeding and harassing wild marine mammals is illegal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and can result in severe penalties with fines up to \$20,000 and one year in jail for the most serious violations.

The PSA can be viewed at <http://www.dontfeedwilddolphins.org/>, which also has more information on dolphin conservation and guidelines for viewing dolphins responsibly in the wild.

Members of the coalition who helped fund development and distribution of the PSA include NOAA’s Fisheries Service, the Marine Mammal Commission, the Harbor Branch

Oceanographic Institution's Protect Wild Dolphins License Plate fund, Mote Marine Laboratory, and members of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. Tinsley Advertising of Miami, FL., created the PSA in partnership with Wit Animation of Santa Monica, Ca.

Supporting Alliance members include Chicago Zoological Society, Disney's Animal Programs, The Dolphin Connection, Dolphin Research Center, Dolphin Quest, Gulf World Marine Park, Marineland's Dolphin Conservation Center, and SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund.

To report marine mammal violations, such as feeding wild dolphins or harassment, please contact NOAA's Fisheries Service Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

Download the PSA:

- Via Sea World
Satellite Feed – 3/12/09
1200 – 1215 ET/ 0900 – 0915 PT
Satellite AMC3
Transponder 22
C-Band
Download Frequency: 4140 Vertical
- Via NOAA's Fisheries Service
<http://dontfeedwilddolphins.org/psa.zip>

On the Web:

Don't Feed Wild Dolphins Web page:

<http://www.dontfeedwilddolphins.org/>

NOAA's Fisheries Service Protect Dolphins Campaign:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/protectdolphins.htm>

NOAA's Fisheries Service Southeast Region Protected Resources Division, Bottlenose Dolphins: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/protres.htm>