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NOAA and Partners Recognize Newest Business to Join Dolphin SMART Program

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NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and its partners accepted the third charter operator into a new program created to help protect wild dolphins in the Keys. Key West Eco Tours officially joined the Dolphin SMART program after successfully meeting standards that promote responsible viewing of dolphins in the wild.

"We are pleased to welcome Key West Eco Tours as the third participant in this important program," said sanctuary superintendent CDR Dave Score. "Dolphin SMART's approach to protecting wild dolphins by working with the businesses that depend on them is an excellent example of the value of partnerships in marine conservation..."

The Dolphin SMART program was developed by the NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program, NOAA's Fisheries Service, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and Dolphin Ecology Project. The project is funded by NOAA's Fisheries and the "Protect Wild Dolphins" license plate funds through Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. The acronym "SMART" is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins,
Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance,
Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near,
Refrain from feeding, touching or swimming with wild dolphins,
Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

"Key West Eco-Tours is proud to participate in the Dolphin SMART program," owner Carla Bellenger said. "Onboard Java Cat we feel it is important to promote responsible viewing of wild dolphins."

Dolphin SMART-approved charters receive flags and stickers and permission to use the Dolphin SMART logo in their advertising. Each year, participants are evaluated to ensure they continue to meet program standards. By looking for the current year on flags and logos and checking the updated participant list, visitors to the Florida Keys seeking the thrill of seeing dolphins in the wild can ensure the tour operator they select is Dolphin SMART. For more information, visit: DolphinSmart

Source: NOAA

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