



Dolphin SMART: Promoting Wild Dolphin Conservation And Benefiting Dolphin Tour Businesses

Within the [Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary](#), there is a small area that is home to a resident group of bottlenose dolphins. It's a special place where the calm, clear waters provide an excellent year-round home for these animals and an ideal setting to observe them in their natural habitat.

However, with no limits to the numbers of operators allowed to conduct dolphin-viewing activities in this small area of the Keys, a greater potential exists for the dolphins to be disturbed. Tour advertisements often promoted close interactions, contradicting the responsible viewing guidelines promoted by [NOAA's Fisheries Service](#). Also, high turnover in the tourist industry created a lack of knowledge and awareness of the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#) and NOAA Fisheries' policies to help prevent harassment of marine mammals.



[Download Full Brochure](#) [PDF]

To address these issues, NOAA's Fisheries Service and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary co-hosted several workshops for tour operators to educate them about the existing laws, guidelines, and how to responsibly view wild dolphins. During these workshops, an education and recognition program was requested to help mitigate the increase in dolphin tour businesses and promote conservation of this small resident dolphin population.



Mother dolphin and calf in the Florida Keys. + [High Resolution](#)

(Credit: Dolphin Ecology Project / NOAA)

This prompted NOAA's Fisheries Service and NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program, in partnership with the Dolphin Ecology Project and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, to team up with local dolphin tour operators and members of the public to develop [Dolphin SMART](#) — a multi-faceted program that promotes responsible viewing and stewardship of wild dolphins in the national marine sanctuary, while recognizing commercial businesses that voluntarily

participate.

This a one-of-a kind program combines viewing and advertising criteria, training, field research, evaluations, outreach and education, as well as incentives for commercial dolphin-viewing businesses that voluntarily participate in the program.



Tour operators who become Dolphin SMART and participate in the program agree to follow program criteria. In turn, active participants benefit from many programs, including:

The First Dolphin SMART operator, Gary Stanyer of Dolphin Safari Charters, is presented the Dolphin SMART flag by Program Coordinator Celeste Weimer. + [High Resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

- Training workshops and a participant handbook
- Vessel flags and decals featuring the Dolphin SMART logo and current calendar year
- The opportunity to use the Dolphin SMART logo in advertising
- Fun and informative educational materials to provide customers about wild dolphin biology and conservation
- Recognition via press releases
- Business listing on the Dolphin SMART Web site as an active participant
- The opportunity to attend continuing education workshops to

enhance educational opportunities for themselves and their customers

Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins

Move away cautiously if dolphins show signs of disturbance

Always put your engine in neutral when dolphins are near

Refrain from feeding, touching, or swimming with wild dolphins

Teach others to be Dolphin SMART

Dolphin SMART Mission
To promote responsible viewing of wild dolphins in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

To remain Dolphin SMART, businesses participate in an annual refresher training and evaluation to ensure they are following the program criteria. This helps maintain the integrity of the program while helping to determine the program's effectiveness.

Nearly one year has passed since NOAA's Fisheries Service and its partners launched Dolphin SMART. And today, the program officially recognizes three businesses as "Dolphin SMART": Dolphin Safari Charters, Sunny Days Catamarans, and Key West Eco Tours. Of the approximately 13 dolphin-viewing businesses currently in the Keys, these three are leading the effort to promote good dolphin stewardship.

By becoming Dolphin SMART and maintaining active participation, businesses have a competitive edge by offering customers an enhanced tour experience, while also demonstrating their commitment to responsible wildlife viewing and dolphin conservation.

Developing and implementing this program has enabled NOAA's Fisheries Service and partners to team up with businesses to enhance conservation of wild dolphin populations, while continuing NOAA's commitment to local economic vitality. NOAA Fisheries hopes to use this program as a model to work with partners and local businesses in other areas to spread the important message of being Dolphin SMART.

