



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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FEEDING AND HARASSING WILD DOLPHINS – A FEDERAL OFFENSE

NOAA Reminds Public to View Wild Dolphins Responsibly This Independence Holiday

NOAA Fisheries Service reminds those planning to spend the day on the water this Fourth of July to responsibly observe wild dolphins from a distance of at least 50 yards. Federal law prohibits feeding and harassing wild dolphins because it can cause serious harm and injury to both dolphins and people.

“Feeding wild dolphins seems to trigger a domino effect of harmful behaviors because dolphins learn to associate people with food and free handouts, bringing them dangerously close to boat propellers and fishing line,” said Stacey Carlson, Bottlenose Dolphin Conservation Coordinator for NOAA Fisheries Service. “And although wild dolphins may exhibit passive or ‘friendly’ behavior, it’s important to remember they are wild animals and their behavior can change quickly and unpredictably.”

Studies have shown that feeding wild dolphins makes them less wary of humans and changes their natural behaviors. For example, dolphins accustomed to receiving handouts alter their normal feeding strategies by begging for food – an unnatural behavior that can be passed on to their calves. Feeding places wild dolphins at greater risk of injury from boats, life-threatening entanglement in fishing gear, or ingestion of inappropriate items, such as fishing hooks and contaminated food.

According to Carlson, some dolphins have become so brazen, potentially from receiving routine handouts, that they are now stealing bait and catch from the lines of recreational fishermen. Last year, there was a marked increase in dolphin strandings associated with entanglement or ingestion of recreational fishing gear.

Other activities, such as deliberately pursuing wild dolphins, whether by personal watercraft or swimming, may cause harassment by disrupting important behaviors, such as feeding, resting, breeding, calving, or traveling.

The agency encourages everyone to learn about wild dolphins and participate in conservation efforts, such as responsibly observing them in their natural habitat by practicing the following:

- Do not feed wild dolphins
- Remain a respectful distance of at least 50 yards
- Use binoculars for best viewing of wild behaviors
- Move watercraft in a predictable manner
- Avoid fishing in an area where dolphins are actively feeding and tossing leftover bait if dolphins are nearby
- Recycle fishing line

Feeding and harassment of wild marine mammals are both illegal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Harassment, as defined in the MMPA, means any act of pursuit, torment or annoyance that has the potential to injure or disrupt the behavior of wild marine mammals. Violations of the MMPA can result in severe penalties with fines up to \$20,000 and one year in jail.

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

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service 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.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

For more information about NOAA Fisheries' Protect Dolphins Campaign, visit:

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

NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources Division, Bottlenose Dolphins

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/protres.htm>

Monofilament Recycling Program

http://floridaconservation.org/mrrp/bin_information.asp

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