



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
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Wild dolphin conservation program expands along Florida's west coast
The Florida Aquarium's Wild Dolphin Ecotour is recognized as Dolphin SMART

NOAA Fisheries Service and its partners welcome a new Tampa Bay tour operator into Dolphin SMART - a unique wild dolphin conservation program. The Wild Dolphin Ecotour at the Florida Aquarium earned Dolphin SMART recognition after successfully demonstrating responsible viewing and advertising of dolphins in the wild and educating patrons on the importance of dolphin conservation.

"We are so pleased to have Florida Aquarium as a part of Dolphin SMART," said Jessica Powell, NOAA's Dolphin SMART Regional Coordinator. "The Florida Aquarium's participation will help us spread important dolphin conservation messages to thousands of visitors annually."

The Florida Aquarium is also the first business to simultaneously become both Dolphin SMART and a *Proud Supporter*. As a *Proud Supporter*, the Florida Aquarium supports Dolphin SMART by raising public awareness of the program and educating the public on the importance of responsibly viewing wild dolphins.

"As a regional leader promoting stewardship of our natural resources, The Florida Aquarium is thrilled to become a part of the Dolphin SMART program," said Lauren DeLuca, a captain of the Wild Dolphin Ecotour's Bay Spirit, "Conservation is an integral part of our mission and it is an honor to be recognized for our proper wild dolphin viewing practices."

The Wild Dolphin Ecotour at the Florida Aquarium is one of 10 Dolphin SMART recognized operators in Florida and Alabama. NOAA encourages visitors to southwest Florida, the Florida Keys, and Alabama to book with a Dolphin SMART business. Vessels of participating businesses carry a Dolphin SMART flag and decal with the current calendar year. Each year, participants are evaluated to ensure they continue to meet program standards. A list of Dolphin SMART businesses is available online at <http://www.dolphinmart.org>.

Viewing dolphins from a responsible distance is a cornerstone of the Dolphin SMART program. Close viewing of wild dolphins may disrupt important natural behaviors such as feeding, nursing, and resting; resulting in negative impacts to the health of dolphin groups and their young. Advertising only natural wild dolphin behaviors is another important feature of the program; rather than showing close human interactions that may disrupt important behaviors.

The Dolphin SMART program was developed by NOAA's Fisheries Service and Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and Dolphin Ecology Project. 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.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#) , [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).

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On the web:

Dolphin SMART: www.dolphinmart.org

NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office:

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/mm/dolphins/bdconservation.htm>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society: www.wdcs-na.org

Dolphin Ecology Project: <http://www.dolphinecology.org/mission/index.html>