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**DOLPHIN FEEDING AND HARASSMENT IS HARMFUL AND ILLEGAL:
Boaters and Tourists Advised to Obey Law, Appreciate Dolphins From a Distance**

NOAA Fisheries reminds people enjoying Florida's coastal waters that it is against federal law to feed or otherwise harass wild dolphins. It is important that people going to the beaches or boating on local waterways be well-informed about wild dolphin safety and health concerns, as well as the federal laws in place to protect the animals.

Dolphin feeding and other harassment continues to occur off Florida, especially during the summer months. Agency officials are concerned that people are unaware that harassing wild marine mammals is dangerous to both animals and humans, and illegal under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The marine mammal viewing guidelines developed by NOAA Fisheries recommend a safe distance of at least 50 yards to observe the animals. Telephoto lenses or binoculars can be used to obtain a good view, but overall viewing time should be limited to 30 minutes or less, and loud noises and abrupt movements should be avoided.

When dolphins approach boats, the NOAA guidelines recommend that boat operators maintain a steady course and avoid abrupt changes in direction or speed to avoid running over or injuring the animals. Boats that are stationary should remain so until the dolphins leave the immediate area.

"We are concerned that viewing marine mammals in the wild can be dangerous to both the animals and to people if not conducted properly and according to established guidelines," says Trevor Spradlin, a marine mammal biologist in the NOAA Fisheries' Office of Protected Resources. "There are numerous examples of marine mammals being injured by boats when people get too close, or of animals being harmed when people try to feed them. In addition, there are several examples of people being injured by marine mammals when they frighten or attempt to touch, swim with, or feed the animals."

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“The best way to protect the dolphins and sea turtles that live in Florida’s coastal waters is to boat responsibly, follow the viewing guidelines, and admire wildlife from a distance,” says Ali Hudon, southeast region outreach coordinator for NOAA Fisheries’ Protected Resources Division. “Following NOAA’s “Southeast Regional Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Viewing Guidelines” will help ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for you and the animals.”

If you see a marine mammal violation, such as people feeding wild dolphins or chasing them with boats, please call the NOAA Enforcement Hotline at (800) 853-1964. To learn more about NOAA’s marine mammal viewing guidelines, visit NOAA online at www.noaa.gov or, to obtain a copy of the “Southeast Regional Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Viewing Guidelines,” call (727) 570-5312 or e-mail Ali.Hudon@noaa.gov.

This and other Southeast Regional news releases and fishery bulletins are available on the region's Internet home page: <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries 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. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

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