



NOAA
FISHERIES

Southeast
Regional Office



NOAA NMFS SEFSC

Violations for feeding, attempting to feed, or harassing dolphins in the wild may result in civil penalties up to \$11,000 or criminal penalties up to \$100,000 plus one year imprisonment.

Please report any violations to:

1-800-853-1964



Bottlenose Dolphins - Strand Feeding

Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are the species of dolphin commonly seen along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, and they routinely travel, feed, rest, and socialize very close to shore. In some areas, bottlenose dolphins "strand feed," a unique hunting behavior in which the dolphins work together in small groups to herd fish towards the shallow water and shore. They then use a powerful wave to push the fish onto the shore; and the dolphins lunge from the water onto the shore to grab the fish.

Strand feeding can seem alarming to watch if you are not familiar with it since the dolphins often work in very shallow water and temporarily beach themselves as they chase fish onto shore. The animals are not in distress and can get back to deeper water on their own, so please do not try to approach them. Giving the dolphins their space while strand feeding is also very important to ensure they are not harassed and this very specialized hunting strategy disrupted.

How to tell the difference between a dolphin that is strand feeding and a stranded dolphin that is in distress?

A dolphin in distress typically is not feeding on fish. They may be either motionless, rolling in the surf or headed directly into the beach (not actively swimming in and out of the shallow water). Other physical signs that a dolphin is in distress include, but are not limited to, injuries and/or entanglement, lethargy, and labored or frequent breathing.

Report dead, injured or entangled dolphins and whales in the Southeast U.S. to 1-877- WHALE HELP! Download the *Dolphin & Whale 911* smartphone app (available on iPhone and Android devices) to learn how to help stranded marine mammals and to connect to the nearest stranding response organization.

What can you do to help dolphins?

- Stay clear of the shore where dolphins are feeding – both by boat or on foot. Dolphins need room to chase the fish up on shore, and may not be able to feed if you're in their way. Be sure to give dolphins plenty of space, and if you see dolphins strand feeding, move at least 50 yards away.
- Enjoy viewing dolphins strand feeding from a safe distance of at least 50 yards (46m). Use binoculars to get a better view, and avoid making any fast, loud or sudden movements.
- Don't feed or attempt to feed wild dolphins! Feeding or attempting to feed dolphins in the wild is both harmful and illegal – this includes throwing fish on the shore back to dolphins while they are strand feeding. Dolphins that are fed by people change their behaviors to associate people with food and lose their natural fear of humans; this puts them at risk of becoming entangled in fishing gear or being struck by boats when approaching people for hand-outs. Also, dolphins may teach these behaviors to their young, putting them at risk of injury or death as well.
- Do not pursue, swim with, or touch wild dolphins. All of these activities have the potential to disturb or harass dolphins, which is illegal. When you disturb dolphins, you may be preventing them from caring for their young, feeding, or resting.

For more information about dolphin conservation in the Southeast U.S., visit:
<http://dolphins.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>