



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE



Photo: Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute

Rio's dorsal fin entangled in yellow-green fishing gear before his rescue in May 2011

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# Frequently Asked Questions about Rio, a Chronically Entangled Dolphin in the Indian River Lagoon

## Who is Rio?

- Rio was an adult male bottlenose dolphin routinely seen in the northern Indian River Lagoon between Oak Hill and New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Rio was found dead and reported on September 9, 2011.
- Rio had been entangled in fishing gear at least six times over the last three years, resulting in three separate and successful disentanglement rescue events: November 2008, March 2010, and May 2011.
- Rio's multiple entanglements over the last three years resulted in considerable injury to and disfigurement of his dorsal fin.
- Just five weeks after his last rescue disentanglement in May 2011, Rio was sighted again with monofilament woven around his dorsal fin.
- Rio was sighted on August 30, 2011 by Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute still entangled, emaciated, and in overall poor condition. Unfortunately Rio was not located during a rescue attempt on September 2, 2011.

## What is Rio's history of entanglement?

Rio was first observed in November 2008 in the northern Indian River Lagoon with recreational braided fishing line cutting deeply into his dorsal fin, potentially causing life threatening injury. Since then he had been entangled multiple times in various fishing gear and rescued three times.

- Rio was successfully rescued and disentangled on November 20, 2008, March 16, 2010, and May 4, 2011.
- A rescue was attempted on September 2, 2011 to disentangle Rio and bring him in to rehabilitation; however, Rio was not located until he was reported dead on September 9, 2011.
- Rescue disentanglements performed by partners from the NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Marine Mammal Stranding Network (SMMSN) including:
  - Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute
  - Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute
  - Volusia County Environmental Management
  - Georgia Aquarium's Dolphin Conservation Field Station at Marineland
  - SeaWorld of Florida
- Due to potential injury to both the dolphin and the rescue personnel, rescue disentanglements are only authorized when injuries are determined to be life threatening.
- Rio's situation can be the unfortunate outcome when wild dolphins are fed by humans. Dolphins lose their fear of humans and boats, associate food with people, take fishermen's bait, catch, or discards, and are much more likely to engage in dangerous behavior around boats and fishermen.



## What happens during a disentanglement rescue effort?

Rescues are dangerous for both the dolphin and the rescue personnel and specialized procedures used help ensure the safety of both.

- Trained SMMSN responders first locate the injured dolphin.
- A special boat and net are used to safely encircle the dolphin.
- Trained personnel temporarily capture the dolphin and hold it in the water or on a specialized boat while a health assessment is performed by a veterinarian. The entangling gear is removed.
- If deemed healthy, the dolphin is immediately released back into the water.
- If the dolphin is in poor condition, it may be transported to an authorized rehabilitation facility. In rare cases, the rescue attempt may result in the dolphin's death or the animal may be in such poor health that the most humane option is euthanasia to prevent additional suffering.
- When a dolphin is released after a rescue, efforts are made to monitor the animal to ensure that it is thriving. This may include attaching a radio or satellite tag to the animal so that it can be located.



Photo Credit: Hubbs-SeaWorld  
Clear monofilament fishing line wrapped around Rio's dorsal fin in August 2011

## What can you do to help protect wild dolphins in the Indian River Lagoon?

There are a number of things you can do to help prevent injuries to and fatalities of bottlenose dolphins:

- Don't cast nets or fishing line towards or around dolphins, especially if they are engaged in feeding activities;
- **Never feed wild dolphins** – it's illegal and teaches dolphins to beg people for food, drawing them dangerously close to fishing gear and boat propellers. Learn more at, [www.dontfeedwilddolphins.org](http://www.dontfeedwilddolphins.org);
- Reel in your fishing line when dolphins are near to prevent interactions and entanglement in fishing gear;
- Inspect your fishing gear often to avoid unwanted line breaks – even small amounts of gear in the water can be harmful to dolphins if entangled or ingested;
- Place all broken or used fishing line in a Monofilament Fishing Line Recycling Bin or a lidded trash can. Local fishing line recycling bins can be found at: <http://mrrp.myfwc.com/>.
- Observe wild dolphins from safe distances of at least 50 yards whenever possible; and
- Avoid touching, swimming, or otherwise closely interacting with wild dolphins, even if they approach you.



Photo Credit: Hubbs-SeaWorld  
Rio foraging around cast net fishing activity. Refraining from active fishing around feeding dolphins will help prevent entanglements and injuries to wild dolphins.

## Who should you call if you see an injured, entangled, or dead dolphin?

If you see an injured, entangled, or dead dolphin, please call the Southeast Region Stranding Network hotline at **1-877-WHALE HELP (1-877-942-5343)**. Please do not push any stranded or injured marine mammal back out to sea.

All marine mammals are federally protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Only local and state officials and people authorized by NOAA Fisheries Service may legally handle live and dead marine mammals. The stranding network will call trained responders who will get to the scene quickly with appropriate equipment.



Monofilament Fishing Line Recycling Bin