

NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE



Photo Credit: Clearwater Marine Aquarium

Winter shortly after arriving at
Clearwater Marine Aquarium

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Frequently Asked Questions Winter, the tailless bottlenose dolphin - How you can help prevent injuries to dolphins

Who is Winter?

- Winter is an approximately 6 year old female bottlenose dolphin in permanent care at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) due to debilitating injuries from a crab trap entanglement.
- Winter stranded on December 10, 2005, near Cape Canaveral, Florida in the Indian River Lagoon when she was approximately 2 months old.
- Winter was found by a fishermen stranded in a crab trap float line with the trap still attached.
- Authorized responders from Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute disentangled Winter and provided initial care and treatment on site. She was then transported by SeaWorld Orlando to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium for rehabilitation.



Photo Credit: Hubbs-SeaWorld

First Responders holding Winter up in the water
prior to transporting to CMA

How did Winter lose her tail?

Winter's tail was wrapped tightly by some of the crab trap float line, which constricted blood flow to her tail. This constricted blood flow resulted in tissue death causing Winter's tail to slough off, leaving her without a tail. With veterinary care and treatment, Winter gradually recovered from her injuries and the remaining tissue surrounding her lost tail healed.

Why can't Winter be released back into the wild?

- Winter's ability to survive in the wild was drastically reduced because of her very young age at the time of the stranding and the complete loss of her tail.
- If released, Winter would not have learned the necessary skills from her mother to survive in the wild, and she would be unable to forage or avoid predators due to the loss of her tail.
- The decision to keep Winter in permanent care at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium was made by NOAA Fisheries Service after consultation with marine mammal veterinarians and behavioral experts.



How can a dolphin become entangled in crab trap gear?

Crab trap gear consists of a wire, plastic, or wooden trap or box connected to a buoy by a line (rope) varying in length based on the water depth. Dolphins may become entangled from:

- Slack in the buoy line, potentially creating bends and loops in the line that may entangle a dolphin while swimming, diving, or feeding nearby; and
- Tipping crab traps to remove and eat the trap's bait inside, increasing the dolphin's risk for entanglement in the float line.
- Sometimes crab traps become lost when buoy lines snap or a storm breaks the trap free. Many may be lost each year to propellers or storms. When this happens, the gear becomes "ghost or derelict" gear and may continue to entangle marine life, including dolphins.



Photo Credit: L. Burdett, NOS/CCEHBR

Live dolphin entangled in crab trap in South Carolina, later successfully disentangled.

How many dolphins are found stranded with crab trap gear from Florida?

In Florida, commercial and recreational crab trap gear is commonly found in inshore bays and nearshore coastal waters. Between 2005-2009, 21% of bottlenose dolphins stranded with detectable evidence of fishery interaction from North Carolina through Texas coasts were associated with crab trap gear, 10% were in Florida. Winter was fortunate to have been rescued and survive the severity of injuries she sustained. Many entangled bottlenose dolphins do not survive.



Photo credit: Hubbs-SeaWorld

Bottlenose dolphin found dead entangled in crab pot gear in the Indian River Lagoon, Florida.

How can you help prevent future injuries to wild dolphins from crab trap gear?

Fishermen can help prevent dolphin entanglements and injuries in crab trap gear by:

- Tending your recreational and commercial crab traps often and removing damaged traps from the water;
- Using inverted crab trap bait wells or other modified traps to discourage dolphins from tipping your traps to feed on bait inside. To learn how to construct an inverted bait well, visit <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/mm/dolphins/bdtrp.htm> under "educational information";
- Limiting buoy lines to the minimum length necessary, especially in shallow or slack water;
- Using a sinking or negatively buoyant line, such as nylon or polyester, to minimize excess line floating at the surface;
- Deploying line in an untangled, straight line to help reduce the risk of it coming off the bottom;
- Reporting derelict crab traps to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and participating in derelict trap retrieval programs - learn more at: <http://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/trap-debris/>.



Inverted bait well

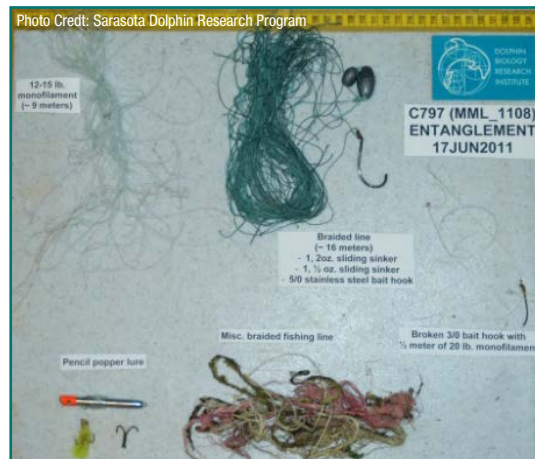


What are other ways I can help prevent injuries or harm to wild dolphins?

Fishing with other commercial and recreational gear types and viewing wild dolphins while on the water can pose harm or injury to dolphins. Below are some simple guidelines to follow that will reduce the chance of entanglement or injury to dolphins from fishing and/or other water-related activities:

When you see dolphins during any water-related activities:

- Never feed wild dolphins – it's illegal under federal law and teaches dolphins to beg people for food, drawing them dangerously close to fishing gear and boat propellers. Learn more at, www.dontfeedwilddolphins.org;
- Avoid touching, swimming, or otherwise closely interacting with wild dolphins, even if they approach you. Harassment is prohibited under federal law, and swimming with wild dolphins may cause harassment.
- Observe wild dolphins from safe distances of at least 50 yards whenever possible. Use binoculars to get the best close-up view of natural, wild dolphin behaviors.



All fishing gear removed from a dolphin calf during a rescue event in Sarasota, FL.

When using recreational hook and line or cast net fishing gear:

- Don't cast nets or fishing line towards dolphins, especially if they are engaged in feeding activities;
- 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; and
- 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/>.



Monofilament Fishing Line Recycling Bin

What should you do if you see a dead or live stranded marine mammal?

- Please immediately call the Southeast Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network hotline at **1-877-WHALE HELP (1-877-942-5343)** if you see a stranded, injured, entangled, or dead marine mammal.
- 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.
- DON'T push the animal back out to sea! Live stranded marine mammals may be sick or injured. Returning animals to sea delays examination and treatment and often results in the animal re-stranding in worse condition. Instead, call 1-877 WHALE HELP to get trained responders on scene as quickly as possible.