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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NOAA Fisheries Monitors Dolphin
Dolphin trapped in freshwater may need assistance

Wildlife officials from NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) are closely monitoring an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin recently seen swimming in Taylor's Bayou, a freshwater area in Texas near the Louisiana state line, eight miles beyond the Gulf of Mexico's saltwater.

Bottlenose dolphins are often confused with their cousin the porpoise, which lives in colder waters. Both dolphins and porpoises live in saltwater estuaries or marine environments. Dolphins can tolerate fresh water for limited periods of time, but long term exposure to fresh water is life threatening.

"We are concerned that this dolphin is unable to find it's way back to the salt water," said Dr. Janet Whaley, veterinarian for the NOAA Fisheries. "We are closely monitoring the situation, and if necessary we will assist."

When a resident contacted local wildlife officials for assistance for the dolphin earlier this week, the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network and other wildlife officials responded and have been carefully monitoring the situation for signs of stress in the animal.

Although rescuers hope that the dolphin will find its way back to saltwater, staff at NOAA Fisheries are currently making contingency plans to help the dolphin. Response to marine mammal strandings or marine mammals in distress is managed by the NOAA Fisheries National Stranding Network. As part of the Southeast Region, the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network includes trained and experienced volunteers who are authorized by NOAA Fisheries to respond to stranded dolphins and whales or animals in distress.

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Since each wayward dolphin event is unique, it is extremely important for federal officials and experienced rescuers to plan and coordinate an appropriate response that is in the dolphin's best interest, while maintaining a safe environment for the rescuers. As a last resort, the team may consider capturing the animal to physically relocate it to its natural habitat. This approach may sound simple, but it is extremely complex and has the potential to be dangerous for both the dolphin and the humans involved.

NOAA Fisheries would like to remind people that dolphins and other marine mammals are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Unauthorized feeding or harassing any wild marine mammal is considered to be a violation of this law.

For the dolphin's sake and human safety, people should not attempt to feed, swim with or approach this or any other dolphin. Food provided by humans may pose a serious health risk to dolphins. Getting too close may also put dolphins at risk of injury from boat propellers.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Residents and boaters in the area can help rescuers by keeping a distance from the dolphin of at least 50 yards and reporting sightings of this dolphin to 1-800-9-MAMMAL.