



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Frequently Asked Questions about Entangled Dolphin in Islamorada, Florida

Have you seen an entangled dolphin near Islamorada, Florida?

There have been recent sightings of an entangled bottlenose dolphin near Islamorada, Florida, specifically the Boy Scout Sea Base. The first photos of this entanglement came on April 1, 2011, although the animal had been observed in the area for several weeks prior. The dolphin appears to have fishing line or similar fishing gear entangled around its dorsal fin. Photos show a clump of gear embedded in and trailing from the dorsal fin. The entangled gear has caused a laceration near the top of the fin. Partners from the Southeast Marine Mammal Stranding Network (SMMSN) are aware of this entangled dolphin and are monitoring its condition.

What is currently being done to help this entangled dolphin?

The Marine Mammal Conservancy, a SMMSN partner, continues to closely monitor this dolphin's health, overall body condition, behavior and the severity of the entanglement. This animal appears to be behaving normally and has been seen eating fish. Its body condition currently appears healthy, except for the entanglement injury itself. If at any time the entanglement appears to be life threatening, a rescue effort to disentangle the animal may be conducted as a last resort by the SMMSN, with NOAA Fisheries approval. Any type of intervention involves capturing a free swimming animal and is usually only attempted as a measure of last resort because of the danger to the animal and rescue personnel. Because rescue efforts are dangerous they are only conducted by experienced marine mammal stranding personnel and veterinarians to ensure safety for the animal and rescuers.

What happens during and after a disentanglement effort?

If a rescue is deemed necessary, typically trained responders will first locate the injured dolphin. Next, 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 the veterinarian. The entangling gear is removed by a veterinarian. If deemed healthy, the dolphin will be 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 relocated.

Why not disentangle the dolphin even if the entanglement is not life-threatening?

There is a high amount of risk involved in a dolphin rescue both for the humans and for the dolphin; therefore, they are conducted only in life-threatening situations as a measure of last resort. In non-life threatening entanglement cases, bottlenose dolphins have been shown to shed gear over time and to go on to live and reproduce normally. Stranding network partners will continue to monitor the animal's health and overall body condition to ensure it is still thriving despite its entanglement. You can help, by reporting the dolphin and its apparent condition to the marine mammal stranding hotline (1-888-404-3922) and following the prevention techniques outlined below.



Photo: Marine Mammal Conservancy, Inc.

Entangled dolphin near Islamorada, FL
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Prevention is key! What can you do to help bottlenose dolphins from becoming entangled?

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

- 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
- Observe wild dolphins from safe distances of at least 50 yards whenever possible.
- Avoid touching, swimming, or otherwise closely interacting with wild dolphins, even if they approach you.
- Reel your fishing line in when dolphins are near to prevent interactions and entanglement in fishing gear.
- Never cast your line towards dolphins.
- 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://www.fishinglinerecycling.org/bin_Listing.asp?county=44

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

If you see an injured, entangled, or dead dolphin, please call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) marine mammal stranding hotline at 1-888-404-3922.

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. FWCC will call trained responders who will get to the scene quickly with appropriate equipment.

On the Web:

NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Southeast: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>

NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/southeast/>