



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

**Southeast  
Regional Office**



Photo credit: K. Mullin

To report marine mammal violations, such as feeding, touching or chasing wild dolphins, contact NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement Hotline: **1-800-853-1964**



## WILD DOLPHIN INTERACTIONS REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

Viewing dolphins in their natural habitat can be an educational and enriching experience if conducted safely and responsibly. As inappropriate human interactions with wild dolphins increase, the risk of disturbing or injuring the animals also increases. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries developed a policy on human interactions with dolphins in the wild to clarify types of activities that may disturb and injure dolphins.

### NOAA Fisheries Policy on Human Interactions

- Interacting with wild marine mammals should not be attempted, and viewing marine mammals must be conducted in a manner that does not harass the animals.
- NOAA Fisheries cannot support, condone, approve, or authorize activities that involve closely approaching, interacting, or attempting to interact with whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, or sea lions in the wild. This includes attempting to swim with, pet, touch, or elicit a reaction from the animals.

### Prohibitions and Violations

- The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and its implementing regulations at 50 CFR 216 prohibits harassing, feeding and attempting to feed marine mammals in the wild.
- Violations can be prosecuted either civilly or criminally and are punishable by up to \$100,000 in fines and up to one year in jail per violation.

### MMPA Regulatory Definitions (50 CFR 216.3)

- **Take** means to harass, hunt, capture, collect, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, collect, or kill, any marine mammal. This includes, without limitation, any of the following: The collection of dead animals, or parts thereof; the restraint or detention of a marine mammal, no matter how temporary; tagging a marine mammal; the negligent or intentional operation of an aircraft or vessel, or the doing of any other negligent or intentional act which results in disturbing or molesting a marine mammal; and feeding or attempting to feed a marine mammal in the wild.
- **Level A Harassment** means any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild.
- **Level B Harassment** means any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering, but which does not have the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild.
- **Feeding** is the offering, giving, or attempting to give food or no-food items to marine mammals in the wild. It includes operating a vessel or providing other platforms from which feeding is conducted or supported. It does not include the routine discard of bycatch during fishing operations or the routine discharge of waste or fish byproducts from fish processing plants or other platforms if the discharge is otherwise legal and is incidental to operation of the activity.

For more information about dolphin conservation in the Southeast U.S., visit: <http://dolphins.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov> or contact: Stacey Horstman at 727-824-5312; [stacey.horstman@noaa.gov](mailto:stacey.horstman@noaa.gov)