

MEDIA RELEASE

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TANGALOOMA DOLPHIN RESCUE

Crowds at the evening dolphin feeding program at Tangalooma Island Resort offered rounds of applause last night as the experienced team at the Tangalooma Marine Education and Conversation Centre (TMECC) performed another successful dolphin rescue.

Silhouette, mother of 12 month old calf Betts and 11 year visitor to the Tangalooma Island Resort Wild Dolphin Feeding Program arrived late last week with fishing line and a stainless steel hook embedded in the side of her mouth.

Manager of the Tangalooma Marine Education and Conservation Centre, Sue Hassard, was last week able to remove the fishing line, but was disturbed to see Silhouette displaying continued signs of injury.

It was then decided to engage the assistance of Sea World Senior Vet David Blyde to coordinate yesterday's rescue and conduct an assessment on Silhouette for serious injury or harm.

The Tangalooma Dolphin Care Team strategized the best approach for the rescue based on previous experience and guidance from Dr Blyde.

Silhouette was treated by Dr Blyde for injuries sustained by fishing lines and hooks, and was injected with an antibiotic supplement to aid recovery. No evidence of hooks was found in or around Silhouettes mouth or throat.

"Once we had her up on the beach, we noticed that she had actually been able to somehow dislodge the hook herself, which is great and we are all relieved, because we were all very worried considering she does have a one year old baby at the moment," said Mrs Hassard.

"I felt like this could have been much more of a traumatic rescue, given that Silhouette was already acting flighty, and being separated from baby Betts, she may have become quite distressed. But Silhouette handled it very well, generally remaining calm throughout the rescue."

To the delight of hundreds of concerned onlookers, Silhouette safely returned to the feeding area and resumed taking fish from the dolphin care team. Her calf Betts remained at ease throughout the duration of the rescue.

"The rescue went smoothly, the team caught her very well. They [dolphins] do well with that kind of capture and release, and short procedure," said Dr Blyde.

"This kind of injury is common now unfortunately with Inshore Bottlenose Dolphins because of the amount of marine debris that we get around the coast, particularly fishing line and fish hooks."

"The problem is that these kind of fishing line entanglements can eventually cause death if they get entangled around the wrong area of the animal so unfortunately it's one of those things that is happening more and more, and we just need to be more vigilant about it."

To appease any confusion or concern, Silhouette's rescue was explained to the guests of the dolphin feeding program, many of whom have become increasingly conscious about the welfare of marine life in the region.

"Unfortunately there are a lot of theories that fish stocks are declining these days and because of that a lot of animals are becoming opportunistic feeders and trying to take fish and bait off fishermen's lines," said Mrs Hassard.

Mrs Hassard used the opportunity to reiterate the importance of sustainable fishing and the use of biodegradable materials and safe methods for discarding fishing materials.

“With last year and the year prior being the worst periods ever for the amount of marine animals seen injured, it is now even more important to fish responsibly and if you do see wildlife, just move that fishing line because starving animals will try and take that bait and we do see a lot more of that happening over here.”

“There is still a concern that Silhouette may have ingested one or two stainless steel hooks which can eventually cause severe internal damage. We will continue closely monitoring Sil to ensure she has the best chance of a full recovery.”

Whilst at Tangalooma Island Resort, Dr Blyde also took the opportunity to check-up on other successful rescue dolphin Nari, who Blyde operated on in 2009 after a severe shark bite. Dr Blyde noted that Nari appears to be doing well.

For more information on the Tangalooma Marine Education and Conservation Centre, visit tangalooma.com/info/dolphin_feeding/tmecc/ (<http://bit.ly/1WpBioK>)

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