

upper keys news



DPMMR/Contributed

Two adult bottlenose dolphins that stranded near Fiesta Key Campground and Marina on Long Key Friday were transported to SeaWorld to be rehabilitated after two unsuccessful release attempts and medical evaluations.

Stranded dolphins recovering at SeaWorld

LONG KEY—Two Atlantic bottlenose dolphins were rescued by the Dolphins Plus Marine Mammal Responder team Friday, July 26, after stranding and struggling in shallow water off the Fiesta Key Campground and Marina at mile marker 70.

The rescue group was notified of the stranding by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Marine Fisheries Service. FWC remained on the scene while team evaluated the two adult dolphins.

“Seeing these two stranded dolphins struggling on their sides to just gasp a single breath of air devastated me. After righting the weaker of the two first and moving them both together into deeper water, it was sad to see that neither could stay upright without assistance,” said Capt. Matt Bellinger, who was on-site assisting in the rescue. “The reality was that both dolphins would’ve drowned on the incoming tide and it horrified me. I was relieved to see the arrival of the DPMMR crew and medical staff.”

After two unsuccessful release attempts, medical evaluation by veterinarian Dr. Jillian Schwartz and consultation with the NMFS, it was determined that both animals needed long-term reha-



DPMMR/Contributed

Rescuers tend to two stranded adult bottlenose dolphins last Friday at Long Key's Fiesta Key Campground and Marina.

bilitation to survive. DPMMR does not yet have the facilities necessary to offer such rehabilitative care, so the two animals

were transferred to SeaWorld in Orlando, which is the only place in the state that had the capability to take on their rehabilitation.

The dolphins will receive veterinary care in a behind-the-scenes area until their recovery. The goal is for the two animals to be

released back into Florida Keys waters, a fate that depends on both the success of the rehabilitation and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The NMFS is the governing agency that determines if an animal is ready for release or not, and if the animals are deemed non-releasable will make the decision on where the animals should be placed.

“If it wasn’t for SeaWorld, these animals would have had to be euthanized. We’re really grateful for their partnership in this rescue and their willingness to support these dolphin’s rehabilitation,” said Nancy Cooper, president of DPMMR.

Cooper says DPMMR has secured a two-acre plot of land in Key Largo to be used for rehabilitation facilities, but in order to become licensed by the NMFS to carry out any long-term rehabilitation, special facilities will need to be developed. These facilities include quarantine pools, filtration systems, sea pens, and support areas (fish preparation, medical room, office space).

The initial development will cost around \$2 million. Approximately \$35,000 of this was raised at the organization’s “Connect to Protect” gala in May.

For more information, visit www.dpmmr.org.