



**For Immediate Release**

**Media Contact:** Courtney Vail, 480-747-5015

**New Dolphin SMART Operator Recognized In Hawaii**

WDCS welcomes Hoku Naia to the Dolphin SMART program. Hoku Naia is the fourth Dolphin SMART operator in Hawaii, and Oahu's third. Hawaiian operators already recognized by the Dolphin SMART program include: Hawaii Nautical/ Port Waikiki Cruises, Ocean Joy Cruises and Holo Holo Charters.

Dolphin SMART operators earn recognition after successfully demonstrating responsible viewing and advertising of dolphins in the wild and educating patrons on the importance of dolphin conservation. The Dolphin SMART program was launched in Hawaii on September 7 on Oahu and originated in Key West in 2007.

Responsible viewing of wild dolphins to ensure their behaviors are not disrupted is a cornerstone of the Dolphin SMART program. Inappropriate viewing of wild dolphins may disrupt important behaviors, such as feeding, nursing and resting, resulting in negative impacts to the health of dolphins and their young. Such disturbance may also be a violation of the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act.

In recent years, there has been an increase in human dolphin interactions in the main Hawaiian Islands. These activities primarily target Hawaiian spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris longirostris*), which are routinely found close to shore in shallow coves and bays where they congregate during the day to rest, care for their young and avoid predators before traveling to deeper water at night to hunt for food. Commercial operators that offer "swim with wild dolphin" tours and individuals that swim or paddle from shore interact with dolphins during times when the animals are at rest. Hawaiian spinner dolphins are a subspecies found only in the Hawaiian Islands and are genetically distinct from other spinner populations, such as those in the Eastern Tropical Pacific.

WDCS is concerned that these human activities displace spinner dolphins from their resting areas and may have population and individual-level effects, and supports a variety of measures to protect spinner dolphins throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Scientific studies have documented human disturbance of Hawaiian spinner dolphins during their resting periods along the west coast of the Big Island of Hawaii, most notably in and around Kealahou Bay.

"We are pleased to see Dolphin SMART being implemented as a positive measure to address spinner dolphin harassment in the Hawaiian Islands," said Courtney Vail, WDCS's Program

Director. “We remain optimistic about the value of this program to wild dolphin conservation and welcome Hoku Naia Charters into the Dolphin SMART program!”

Hoku Naia joins three other Hawaiian and ten other Dolphin SMART recognized operators in Florida and Alabama. WDCS encourages visitors to the Florida Keys, southwest Florida, Alabama and now Hawaii to book with a Dolphin SMART operator. Vessels of participating businesses carry a Dolphin SMART flag and decal with the current calendar year. A list of current Dolphin SMART businesses is available online at [www.dolphinSMART.org](http://www.dolphinSMART.org).

Guests booking Dolphin SMART businesses can be assured they will enjoy an enhanced tour experience, while knowing they are aiding wild dolphin conservation efforts. Dolphin SMART businesses are trained by experts to recognize behaviors and provide educational information about the animals. They also only display advertisements showing natural wild dolphin behaviors without human influences, another cornerstone of the program.

The Dolphin SMART program was launched in 2007 by WDCS, NOAA’s Fisheries Service, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, and Dolphin Ecology Project. The “SMART” acronym is a reminder of the basic principles of dolphin viewing etiquette:

- \* Stay at least 50 yards from dolphins
- \* Move away slowly if the dolphins show signs of disturbance,
- \* Always put your vessel engine in neutral when dolphins are near,
- \* Refrain from feeding, touching, or swimming with wild dolphins,
- \* Teach others to be Dolphin SMART.

Local businesses and organizations are also showing their solidarity for wild dolphin conservation by becoming Proud Supporters of Dolphin SMART. Dolphin SMART Proud Supporters help raise public awareness about the program and educate the public on why it is important to responsibly view wild dolphins.

Program Partner resources on the web:

Dolphin SMART: [www.dolphinSMART.org](http://www.dolphinSMART.org)

NOAA Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Regional Office: <http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/>

NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office:

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/mm/dolphins/bdconservation.htm>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Dolphin Ecology Project: <http://www.dolphinecology.org/mission/index.html>