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## **954 LIVE STRANDING OF DOLPHINS AT TUTICORIN - RESCUE AND RELEASE OPERATIONS**

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On 23.04.2000 two dolphins were found swimming in the shallow waters of Karapad (Tuticorin) bay situated near CMFRI fish culture pond and parallel to the harbour link road by few fishermen during the early hours of the day. The water in this shallow area is clear, unlike the

open bay which is ash ridden. They passed on the information to the CMFRI employees who were on watch duty. Later few nature lovers tried to help the dolphins by scaring them away into open bay. But dolphins returned to the shallow water and reluctant to move further into the

deeper turbid water. This behaviour was similar to our earlier encounter during the second week of August 1999 near Tuticorin Thermal Power Station.

In the course of time few people gathered at the sight, caught hold of the dolphins and started torturing them. However, the timely interventions of some public, staff of CMFRI and members of Press rescued them and helped them to reach safely the deeper area of the bay. The successful attempt of public was well appreciated and flashed in the local press and TV net work.

On 24.04.2000 once again one dolphins was found swimming in the shallow waters of the above said area. Once again the life saving mission was initiated by staff of CMFRI along with Officials of Forest (Marine) to pursue the animal to reach the deeper clear water. As the animal was quite healthy and swims fast with periodic diving, the rescue team could not easily reach and direct the dolphin to deepwaters and hence the rescue operations were suspended.

The dolphin was found swimming on the following day in the same area at little lesser speed, incessant swimming and the partial starvation had rendered the animal tired which made easy to rescue the animal after an hours hard struggling (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Rescue operation

The animal was tamed by gentle holding and patting followed by rolling of smooth cloth around its body for holding without creating any disturbance to breathing and injury to its external organs. Utmost care was taken not to exert any pressure so as to cause internal injury in handling. Even while holding no pressure was exerted in the ventral side and while manually carrying the animal was kept wet by keeping in sea surface; dorsal down and blow hole above water. This way the marine mammal was prevented from suffocating and with no hinderence to its normal breathing. Under the tender care, the animal became quite like a pet and did not show any aggressiveness.

The dolphin was identified from external morphology as *Tursiops truncatus aduncus*, a male measuring 2.62m and weighing approximately 175kg. (Table 1). Few mild bruises were seen on the body. Hundreds of people gathered to see the live dolphin. Then the dolphin was slowly and gently returned to the deeper clear water of open sea by swimming along the dolphin. The sea and coastal area was monnitord for the next two days for any stranding of dolphins. There were no reports of stranding in the following days which confirms the success of rescue operation, first of its kind from India.

TABLE 1. Morphometric measurements in cm of *Tursiops truncatus aduncus* stranded live at Tuticorin on 24.04.2000.

Total length	:	262
Beak length	:	11
Jaw length	:	33
Snout to blowhole	:	38
Snout to eye	:	41
Dorsal base	:	39
Dorsal height	:	46
Inner curvature	:	31
Flipper base	:	23
Flipper length	:	41
Inner curvature	:	25
Grith at dorsal	:	150
Weight (Approx)	:	175kg.
Sex	:	Male