

# Recovering dolphin can't return to the wild

## Calf's too young to fend for itself

BY LISA FUSS

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LONG KEY — The dolphin calf found ailing Jan. 19 off Duck Key cannot be returned to the wild, marine biologists say, and will need to be placed in a marine facility with other dolphins.

Blair Mase, a Miami-based marine biologist and southeastern stranding coordinator for the National Marine Fisheries Service, said a panel of biologists and researchers have concluded that the male calf cannot be weaned from human care.

The baby dolphin, whose mother is believed to have died in the mass stranding Jan. 16 in Layton, has remained at the Keys Marine Laboratory on Long Key, where it continues to recover from dehydration, stress and cuts to its dorsal fin. Since being rescued, the calf has gained weight and grown more than an inch in length, but has a long way to go before it is considered healthy, Mase said.

Marine Animal Rescue Society Executive Director Craig Pelton has been handling the day-to-day care of the dolphin and, though disappointed, believes keeping the calf in captivity is the only option. Baby dolphins typically spend the first few years of life with their mothers, learning to hunt and socialize.

"Without that opportunity, he's not going to make it out there," Pelton said. "Ultimately, [the society] wants to see dolphins returned to the wild after rehabilitation, but often, as in this case, it's not in the dolphin's best interest. Releasing him, healthy or

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