

## Flipper's Tale

Good afternoon commissioners and thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Kelly French, and I live at The Pointe in Cortez. You may know me by my more popular name, Flipper, the bottlenose dolphin.

My species has been studied in the Sarasota Bay area for more than 55 years. Researchers know how man-made disturbances, such as boat strikes, pollution, climate disruption, and entanglement in, hooking by, or ingestion of fishing gear are affecting my health, survival and, *ahem*, reproductive success. I can't vote, but I am a local resident, and I sure need your help!

My over 170 friends and I face increased threats from human activities, especially in coastal and inshore waters where the overlap of people like you and dolphins like me is the greatest. Some of these threats, particularly noise, vessel traffic, harassment, pollution, and habitat alteration, result in acute impacts, leading quickly to death, while others lead to chronic conditions leaving many of my community members unable to function normally or reproduce successfully.

Estimates are In Sarasota Bay we have boats passing by every 6 minutes. Noise generated from their engines interferes with my very sensitive hearing which in turn impacts my ability to communicate, forage and find prey fish. *Give me break – a dolphin's gotta eat!*

To understand the human impacts on dolphins, long-term studies in Sarasota Bay conducted by the Sarasota Dolphin Research Program provide long-term data documenting our lives. One of their underwater acoustic monitoring stations is at The Pointe near the old Seafood Shack.

Mote Marine Laboratory's Stranding Investigations Program has determined that between 1985 and 2020, 26% of identifiable causes of death for Sarasota Bay dolphins were from human interactions - increasingly, from boat strikes. Many of us along with our manatee friends, who share our habitat, carry scars when the strikes don't kill us.

In recent years, the Sarasota Dolphin Research Program has adopted an approach of helping the public to appreciate my relatives as individually identifiable long-term residents—we are your mammalian neighbors who live in the bay year-round, across multiple decades and generations – we aren't anonymous gray creatures of unknown backgrounds. The hope is that if you can better relate to us as individuals, you will care more about how you impact us.

I am asking that you do that now and not put us in harm's way by introducing boat ramps and their associated traffic into our habitat in Cortez. I am one of your major tourist attractions. Please don't force me to find a new home. By the way, my manatee friends agree!