

UMS nursing beached dolphin

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KOTA KINABALU: A Spinner dolphin, one of the smallest species of dolphins, which beached in Tuaran yesterday is now being nursed at the Borneo Marine Research Institute of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

In announcing this, director of UMS' Borneo Marine Research Institute Prof Dr Saleem Mustafa said the institute was informed about the beaching of the Spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*) in Tuaran at about noon on Wednesday.

He said his staff reached there and joined the efforts of other government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in rescuing the animal.

"The dolphin measures more than two metres and weighs around 70kg. It is an adult and mature specimen which could be at least

seven years of age. It has a narrow body and long beak.

"Spinner dolphins primarily consume food at night. Their food comprises fish and squids. Spinner dolphins rest during daylight hours. This specimen is a bit restless for the ordeal of stranding it has undergone and, possibly, other problems which we cannot diagnose by external observation.

"I could not see it sleeping. Dolphins do not sleep like humans. They will drown and die of suffocation if they sleep like us. They remain conscious. A healthy dolphin rests by floating at the surface, with one eye open. After some time, it closes this eye and opens the other one. I have not seen this alternative eye opening and closing activity. Obviously, the dolphin is not in a good condition and is restless," he said in a

statement, here yesterday.

Saleem said the dolphin showed behavioural signs of stress, and it was not known if the dolphin belonged to the resident population in Sabah or had migrated from another area.

In such cases, he said, no quick answer could be provided for questions related to the cause of beaching.

"There are many possibilities, including eating on prey organisms contaminated by toxins, extreme exhaustion, sickness due to infection, disorientation and injuries.

Saleem said there were no visible or external signs of extreme dehydration and no extreme dryness of skin or skin peeling and cracking.

He said that with the help of those who volunteered for rescue,

the dolphin was kept wet and cool by splashing water on the skin because it stranded during bright day time when the sun was strong. We ensured that water splashing did not cover the blowhole.

"We avoided pushing the beached animal back to the sea because of the risk that if the dolphin was sick it could beach elsewhere in a remote location and might die," he said of how they handled the dolphin.

Saleem said the dolphin reached the Borneo Marine Research Institute at 4.40 pm on the same day and was immediately transferred to a large tank in the hatchery especially arranged for the purpose.

"Initially, the animal was seen swimming in a disoriented condition but regained its near normal posture. Early this morning (Dec 27), I noticed

restless behaviour and disoriented swimming," he said.

He said the institute would continue to take care of the animal, reduce stress as much as possible and provide clean sea water and food as well as monitor the health condition according to quarantine requirements.

"The dolphin will be returned to the sea if it gets strong enough to fend for itself in the wild. I do not think the dolphin is out of danger. We do not know if it will survive despite our best possible efforts.

"All I can say is that probably it would not have survived had it been not been taken care of. We can say with more certainty about its chances of survival if we see it regaining its normal swimming posture, resting position and appetite," he said. - Bernama