

# Navy dolphins move to UCSC's Long Marine Lab

Long Marine Laboratory, home to an array of sea lions, elephant seals and harbor seals, has acquired two new residents: Primo and Puka, a pair of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins from a U.S. Navy facility in San Diego.

The male dolphins are on loan from the Navy to Long Marine Lab for at least one year. They are the vanguard of a cooperative program in which civilian researchers will study some of the Navy's dolphins to learn in detail how their bodies work and how they survive

in the ocean. Much of this research will help other scientists manage wild dolphins more effectively by revealing how human and natural influences may disrupt their populations.

Initially, Primo and Puka (pronounced "pooka") will be part of an ongoing research project by Terrie Williams, a new assistant professor of biology at UC-Santa Cruz. Other researchers and students will have access to the dolphins later during the first year.

Primo and Puka may stay at Long Marine Lab beyond one year if members of the cooperative research group feel there is potential for further useful research.

"Due to the downsizing of the Navy, we have less need to use some of these dolphins in operations," said Les Bivens, head of the biosciences division at the San Diego naval facility, known as NRaD.

"However, these animals have been well trained for tasks in the

open ocean. We want to make them available to the civilian community, especially the university community, for research projects that are of mutual interest to scientists and the Navy."

Among these projects, Bivens said, are studies concerning the physiology of the animals and issues related to their conservation.

Primo and Puka arrived at Long Marine Lab Oct. 6, following transport from San Diego to Moffett Field on a C-130 cargo plane and a

drive to Santa Cruz on a flatbed truck. The dolphins traveled in specially designed slings within fiberglass tanks, their bodies supported by foam and partially covered by seawater. Trainers and veterinarians attended them during the entire journey and carefully monitored their vital signs.

Primo is a mature adult, about age 14, while Puka is near maturity, about age 9. Each dolphin is close to 8 feet long and weighs roughly 400 pounds.

They were captured in the Gulf

of Mexico in the mid-1980s and joined a group of dolphins at the former Naval Ocean Systems Center (recently renamed NRaD) in Oahu, Hawaii. That center closed during the military base realignment, and in September 1993, the Navy moved most of the Hawaii dolphins to San Diego.

Both Primo and Puka were trained for acoustic research, primarily to detect, find, mark and recover objects in the ocean. Neither dolphin, however, was active in the Navy's operations.