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Finless Porpoise Rescue

Sea Life Busan runs a unique and vital rescue and rehabilitation programme for endangered finless porpoises. The finless porpoise is the only porpoise to lack a true dorsal fin. Instead there is a low ridge covered in thick skin bearing several lines of tiny tubercles. In addition, the finless porpoise is the smallest of all whales and the forehead is unusually steep compared with those of other porpoises. Finless porpoises can grow to as much as 1.9 m in length, and can weigh up to 72 kg, although most are rather smaller. Most are found in the warm waters off the coasts of India and Pacific Ocean, and in some freshwater areas and in Korea, most are found in the west coast and sometimes around the islands

Korea hosts the biggest population of these rare sea mammals, with more than 30,000 said to be living in its western and southern seas. In addition to dwindling food sources they are under threat from dragnets, in which they frequently get entangled and end up drowning. However, those caught in offshore fishnets in shallow waters are often found simply wounded and dehydrated. These are the casualties that Busan seeks to help.

Long designated a Conservation Institution and special Marine Animal Conservation Centre, by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, Busan has rescued lots of sea animals such as whale sharks, green sea turtles, seals, and even dolphins. Although Korea has the largest finless porpoise numbers, most people are not aware of their plight or the dangers they currently face in the wild. Busan Sea Life entered into a partnership with the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) in 2011 as an opportunity to conduct joint research with the Cetacean Research Institute (CRI) under the NFRDI. Since then it has rescued five finless porpoises; two in 2011, two in 2013 and one in 2014. Following an extensive rehabilitation program two were successfully released in 2013 and another two in July 2014. The one rescued in May, 2014 is still undergoing rehabilitation at the aquarium, but should be ready to return to the wild in July 2015. Sea Life Busan hopes now to expand its work with the species to include more detailed research into its wild status and survival needs. It hopes to attract Government funding to enable this to happen...and to step up its efforts to educate the general public, fisheries authorities and fishermen themselves as to the need to protect this vulnerable creature.