



Dolphinaria are unacceptable

Comments by World Animal Protection on ABTA's guidance manual 'Dolphins in Captive Environments'

Background

In June 2013, UK's leading travel association ABTA launched their global welfare guidance for animals in tourism. Travel associations in other countries, notably Futouris in Germany and ANVR in The Netherlands, are adapting this guidance to their local markets, needs and norms. World Animal Protection applauds these initiatives and is committed to work with travel associations to achieve robust and practical guidance for responsible animal welfare conduct in tourism. The ABTA guidance provides an excellent point of departure to do so, but it warrants improvement in certain areas. The area of 'Dolphins in Captive Environments' is a case in point. In this document, World Animal Protection explains its position and signals concerns that need to be addressed with regards to the use of cetaceans in captivity for entertainment and public display.

General comments

Recognizing the animal welfare concerns associated with the demand for wildlife in tourism irrespective of whether the animals involved have been sourced from the wild or bred in captivity, World Animal Protection is opposed to the confinement, exhibition or performance of wild animals for commercial gain and/or human entertainment. It is wrong to keep cetaceans in captivity for the purpose of public display and entertainment. The lives of captive marine mammals are impoverished: no captive environment can satisfy the complex physical, behavioral and social requirements of these highly intelligent and far-ranging animals.

Moreover, World Animal Protection does not consider that claims for the 'educational value' of dolphinariums can be justified. People do not receive an accurate picture of a species from captive representatives. Worse yet, it desensitizes people to captivity's inherent cruelties—for so many captive marine mammals the world is a tiny enclosure, and life is devoid of naturalness. Besides, the trade in live marine mammals not only negatively impacts animal welfare, but also populations and habitat.

World Animal Protection acknowledges that substantial differences between dolphin exhibits exist and that a shift from bad to best practices will reduce some of the harms, but eventually, 'better' dolphinariums are not



Captive dolphins performing at an aquatic theme park

a sustainable solution, since they do not escape the inherent problems of captivity. Visiting facilities that keep captive cetaceans creates and sustains a demand for this cruel industry to continue.

World Animal Protection therefore urges travel companies not to promote such facilities and instead look for responsible whale or dolphin watching tours to let their customers enjoy these magnificent animals at sea, performing on their own terms, without having to confine and submit them to abuse.

Since tourism is one of the biggest - if not biggest - driver of dolphin exhibits, travel organizations are key in achieving change. World Animal Protection therefore welcomes very much steps taken by the tourist industry to shift their impact towards a better world for animals. In the case of dolphin exhibits, these should be geared towards a responsible phase out of the captive cetacean entertainment industry.

Specific comments

With regards to the ABTA guidance manual on dolphins in Captive Environments, World Animal Protection notes that:

- Research and classification of dolphins in captivity in the category 'acceptable practice' do not match: from research it becomes clear that any captive environment falls short to meet the requirements for good animal welfare, especially with regards to the expression of social and natural behavior (Welfare Quality® criteria number 9 and 10).

- Several management proposals, especially on public interaction with the animals, will be next to impossible to adequately implement and safeguard. Given the associated health and welfare risks, the use of cetaceans as photographic props, swim-with interactions, feeding or other contact is unacceptable. Italy's Regulations for the keeping of dolphins in captivity already prohibit contact between dolphins and members of the public.
- Captive breeding of wild animals like dolphins without a valid conservation program, aiming at rehabilitation and release into the wild, should be regarded as unacceptable, due to inadequate lifelong captive conditions and sustaining an industry that may meet part of their demand by wild poached animals.
- The proposed minimum requirements do not address some of the worst features of the captive cetaceans industry:
 - Wild capture of dolphins causes enormous and prolonged stress, increased mortality and tragically disrupts the strong social bonds these animals can form. This cruelty can therefore never be justified by entertainment or 'educational' purposes. Any facility that acquires a wild caught dolphin or their offspring without the objective of rehabilitation and release of this animal into the wild should be an absolute no go.
 - Cetaceans show many individual diversity and preferences. Imposing standards based on average needs inevitably harm individuals with different predilections.
 - Cetaceans are highly social – and the importance of the bonds they form may even exceed those of inter-human bonds. Cetaceans should therefore be given the opportunity to opt-in and opt-out to form social relationships. Facilities that terminate important bonds by trade in or exchange of cetaceans should be considered to be utterly unacceptable.
 - Cetaceans in captivity may form strong emotional bonds with their caregivers. Changes in staff can therefore be traumatic and betray the animal's trust that has been build.
- Given their potential very long life span, their enormous range and complex social bonds, the captivity of orca's is the worst of the worse. Any support for or promotion of facilities that keep these animals for entertainment or are aiding these facilities to do so, should be considered as totally unacceptable.
- Noncompliance with existing regulation. For example, European dolphinariums fail to meet the requirements of the EU Zoos Directive.

Knowledge about cetaceans has increased considerably the past decades, but still show many gaps and uncertainties. This warrants both ethically sound further research and strict appliance of the precautionary principle. Given the existing power relations and the intrinsic value of animals, the benefit of the doubt should always go to the animal.



Free dolphins swimming in the wild

Conclusion

In light of the above, **World Animal Protection** proposes to reclassify cetaceans in captivity as 'unacceptable practice' for the tourist sector. Being aware that both the ABTA and Futouris guidelines are voluntarily and travel organizations are not legally required to implement them, this reclassification would encourage them to take significant steps to decrease demand and raise standards with the goal to responsibly phase out the use of cetaceans in captivity for entertainment and public display.



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