



Dr Allan Zeman GBM, GBS JP
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August 2011

Dear Dr. Zeman

We are writing on behalf of the Asia for Animals 2011 organising committee members, representing international organisations with extensive knowledge of animal welfare issues. We express our deep concern with regards the capture of beluga whales from their natural habitat to be imported into Hong Kong to provide entertainment at Ocean Park.

We are opposed to the live capture of cetaceans to be displayed at marine parks. Capture methods are invasive, stressful and potentially lethal. Captive facilities, with their space limitations and commercial considerations, cannot provide conditions that allow cetaceans to express their natural behaviours to meet their physical and psychological needs.

- Family and group members are separated from each other;
- Studies are rarely conducted to ascertain what happens to those animals left behind;
- Once removed from their natural environment, whales are transported to small enclosures which are usually only a fraction of the size of their natural home range, and lack their family members and social groups;
- The lifespan of captive beluga whales is at most only half the length of wild living individuals¹
- Research has shown that mortality rates for bottlenose dolphins (and possibly other cetacean species) increase six-fold during and immediately after capture²

Whales and dolphins are wide-ranging, social animals and captivity cannot provide them with the social, visual and auditory stimuli of their natural environment. They must adapt to an artificial diet, strange noises, and the unnatural proximity of people and other captive animals. Many will suffer from the stress of confinement, which often results in aggression and other behavioural abnormalities, reduced calving success, stomach ulcers, and reduced immune response. These in turn results in poor quality of life, reduced life expectancy and higher infant mortality than what the animals would experience in the wild.

¹ R. E. A. Stewart et al., "Bomb radiocarbon dating calibrates beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*) age estimates," *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 84 (2006): 1840–1852; C. Lockyer et al., "Age determination in belugas (*Delphinapterus leucas*): A quest for validation of dentinal layering," *Aquatic Mammals* 33 (2007): 293–304. Referenced in "The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity" http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/marine_mammals/case_against_marine_captivity.pdf

² R. J. Small and D. P. DeMaster, "Acclimation to captivity: A quantitative estimate based on survival of bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions," *Marine Mammal Science* 11 (1995): 510–519.

The welfare issues involved in capturing, transporting and confining a wild animal such as a beluga whale to a restricted tank or pool cannot be justified on the basis of potential educational benefits to the general public. Indeed, in viewing these animals at HK Ocean Park, the general public would learn that removing animals from their natural habitat for the entertainment of humans is acceptable, and that an animal displaying signs of stress is normal. This is not a message that we can afford Hong Kong's public, particularly its children to learn.

Your corporate social responsibility policy states that you strive to deliver the highest standards of animal care. Removing beluga whales from the wild, placing them in a holding facility prior to transporting them to Hong Kong is detrimental to their quality of life and does not provide these animals with the highest standards of care.

On behalf of all of our members globally, we appeal to you to organise the release of these whales back into their natural habitat and to commit to not capturing any marine mammals from the wild for display at Ocean Park in the future.

Sent on behalf of the following organisations:

- Animal Guardians
- Animal People
- Animals Asia Foundation
- Animal Concerns Research & Education Society
- Humane Society International
- International Animal Rescue
- International Fund for Animal Welfare
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (UK)
- Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Hong Kong
- World Society for the Protection of Animals

Please respond to David Neale, Animal Welfare Director, Animals Asia Foundation, 10/F, Kai Tak Commercial Building 317-319 Des Voeux Road, Central, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

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For further information please see "The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity"
http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/marine_mammals/case_against_marine_captivity.pdf

Copied to:

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