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**10<sup>th</sup> August 2011**

Dear Mr Lim

Thank you for your response to our coalition letter to Mr Tan Hee Teck on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2011. We would like to respond in turn to some of the points you raise.

You state that dolphins by their nature, enjoy interacting with humans, even in the wild. This is an inappropriately anthropocentric and anthropomorphic statement, one for which you would find little support in the scientific literature. Research on the reactions of free-ranging dolphins to swimmers suggests that they are often disturbed by these interactions (*see Bejder and Samuels, 2003, for a review of this research*).

Cases where dolphins approach humans, rescue them at sea, and otherwise initiate contact are actually quite rare, compared to the number of instances where they react in a neutral or evasive manner to swimmers. You will forgive us if we point out that in captivity they are doing a job for their trainers, paid for in fish. In fact, research has shown that captive dolphins prefer spending time away from swimmers when given a choice (*Kyngdon et al. 2003*). Most of the time, of course, they are not given this choice.

It is understandable to project our own desires on animals; we want to believe that dolphins seek our company as passionately as we seek theirs. However, common sense and objectivity suggest that this is highly unlikely. Wild dolphins are competent and self-sufficient and do not need our company. The situations where they do seek us out are correspondingly rare. Captive dolphins are being exploited; your reply to us indicates that you care deeply for these animals, and one way to show this would have been to leave them undisturbed in their natural habitat, rather than paying for them to be traumatically captured from the wild as part of the Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) business plan.

You also state that “*scientific data over the past decades point to the fact that bottlenose dolphins can thrive within marine parks, even living in excess of 40 years, which research shows is greater than the average life span of dolphins in the wild.*” This comparison is invalid. It is true that a small number of bottlenose dolphins have lived in excess of 40 years in captivity, but the majority do not. Dolphins also live well past 40 years in the wild. The best scientific data indicate that in the best facilities, the annual

survivorship rate in captivity is about the same as in the wild for bottlenose dolphins (*Small and DeMaster, 1995; Woodley et al., 1997*). However, you compare the *maximum* life span in captivity with the *average* life span in the wild; this is comparing apples to oranges, an act that the public display industry has long accused animal protection advocates of doing when they compare the average life span of captive dolphins to the maximum life span of wild dolphins. It seems ironic that you are now making the same invalid comparison in reverse.

It is accurate to state that average and maximum life spans are generally the same in either environment when using data from the best captive display facilities. It remains to be seen if RWS would find itself in the company of the best facilities. When looking at public display facilities overall, the annual survivorship rate of captive bottlenose dolphins is still lower than in a well-studied population in Florida, although this difference is no longer statistically significant (*Small and DeMaster, 1995*). Captive dolphins exhibiting life spans similar to those of wild dolphins is an improvement, but it still begs the question of why they do not survive far better than their wild counterparts, given the fact that captive dolphins have no predators, never face food shortages or pollution, and receive regular veterinary care.

*Tursiops aduncus*, the species you seek to display at RWS, is less well-studied than its close cousin, *T. truncatus*, and it is possible that it is less adaptable to captivity. It would be tragic if the life history data from the dolphins destined for RWS show that *T. aduncus* is more vulnerable to stress than the more physically robust *T. truncatus*. Certainly the grim mortality data from the *T. aduncus* sent to Mexico in 2003 from the Solomon Islands suggest that they are more easily stressed (Alaniz and Rojas, 2007; Legoretta, 2008), with 12 out of 28 dying within five years.

You also state that after three years, it would be irresponsible to consider returning the dolphins destined for RWS to the wild. This is an interesting statement. If dolphins, long-lived and intelligent, become so changed from their natural state after only three years that they would be unable to survive in the wild, it seems unlikely that captivity is as benign as you state. It seems more likely that captivity has a negative impact on the competency and welfare of dolphins. However, it is actually unclear whether wild-caught dolphins, after only three years in captivity, could be successfully returned to the wild; the science is simply not available to make a prediction one way or the other.

In general, the statements in your reply to us are not supported by the best available science. Of course, if you have the citations for the scientific research to which you refer when you state that dolphins “thrive in marine parks,” we would be most grateful to receive them.

On behalf of all of our members globally, we repeat our appeal for you to release these dolphins back into their natural habitat and to commit to not capturing any cetaceans from the wild for display at Resorts World Sentosa 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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## References

- Alaniz P., Y. and L. Rojas O. 2007. *Definarios*. AGT Editor, S.A., Mexico City. 342 pp.
- Bejder, L. and A. Samuels. 2003. Evaluating the effects of nature-based tourism on cetaceans. In: *Marine Mammals: Fisheries, Tourism and Management Issues*. N. Gales, M. Hindell and R. Kirkwood (eds). CSIRO Publishing, pp. 229-256.
- **Kyngdon, D.J., E.O. Minot and K.J. Stafford. 2003.** Behavioural responses of captive common dolphins *Delphinus delphis* to a 'Swim-with-Dolphin' programme. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 81: 163–170.
- Legoretta Ordorica, J. 2008. Letter to Minister TAN Mah Bow, Singapore.

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