

Captive Cetacean Welfare and Status in the EU

Scientific evidence as to why whales, dolphins and porpoises should not be in captivity for entertainment

INTRODUCTION

- There are **33 captive facilities** (dolphinaria) keeping an estimated total of 309 individual cetaceans (dolphins, whales and porpoises) in 15 EU Member States. Spain (11) and Italy (4) host the majority of facilities. Species include bottlenose dolphins (an estimated 283 individuals), orca (12 individuals), harbour porpoise (estimated 11 individuals), beluga whales (two individuals) and one Amazon River dolphin (January 2015).
- Thirty two facilities are **licensed as zoos**, therefore they must principally comply with the requirements of the **EC Zoos Directive 1999/22**: promote, protect and **conserve wild fauna**; provide **meaningful education** about the species exhibited; and ensure **high standards in animal husbandry** and species-specific enrichment. These requirements must be incorporated in national legislation.
- Five Member States (Belgium, Finland, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom) have specific legislative standards for the keeping of cetaceans in captivity. In the UK the introduction of **high standards brought about an end to captive dolphin facilities**. In Italy, the legislation is poorly implemented. Of the five facilities that exist, two have been forced to close due to substandard conditions and one dolphinarium is being investigated for the mistreatment of dolphins.
- According to the industry, the majority of cetaceans in captivity in the EU are captive born. However, as wild animals (and not domestic) they **retain the same innate behaviour**, seen in wild cetaceans, and therefore they have the same welfare needs. Analysis shows that captivity compromises the welfare of wide-ranging carnivores (Clubb & Mason, 2003). The species of whales and dolphins found in captivity in the EU are all wide-ranging carnivores.
- The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) prevents the wild capture of cetaceans from EU waters and EC Regulation 338/97 prohibits imports of wild-caught cetaceans for **commercial purposes**. Wild-caught cetaceans have, however, been imported, ostensibly for education or research purposes, despite these individuals also being displayed in commercial dolphinaria. **The risk remains that further wild-caught imports will occur.**
- The majority of dolphinaria are **non-compliant with the requirements of the EC Zoos Directive** (WDC *et al*, 2015). Principally, dolphinaria are commercial businesses that deliver public entertainment, with little emphasis given on their legal obligations to provide public education and species conservation.

WELFARE CONCERNS

- **Restrictive space:** The largest captive facilities are just a fraction of the size of the natural home ranges of cetaceans (Tyack, 2009). Orcas, for example, may travel as far as 100 kilometres in a day (Matkin *et al* (1997). When denied adequate space, large, wide-ranging carnivores commonly develop problems such as abnormal repetitive behaviour (termed stereotypies) and aggression (Clubb & Mason, 2003).
- **Limited social environment:** Captive cetaceans are given no choice to sharing a pool with often unrelated, from different geographic regions or from different species, which can result in changes to natural group dynamics leading to dominance-related aggression, injuries, illness and even death (Waples & Gales, 2002). In the wild, the majority of cetacean species live in interrelated family groups, or pods. These highly intelligent, social species can be found in aggregations of 100 or more animals.
- **Environmental quality and complexity:** Captive facilities cannot provide an environment that simulates the complex natural marine environment. Most pools are smooth-sided, small and virtually empty of stimuli (Couquiaud, 2005).

- **Noise:** Loud music and the regular, repetitive noise of pumps and filters are thought to **cause significant stress to captive cetaceans**, who are highly dependent on their sense of hearing (Couquiaud, 2005). Captive dolphins spend much of the time with their heads at the water's surface or out of the water; therefore, they are subjected to prolonged, loud sounds, which can result in **physiological stress and damage** (Wright *et al.*, 2007). There is no scientific, published data to suggest that the welfare of captive dolphins is not compromised by exposure to loud music in-air.
- **Behavioural restrictions:** Training and performance in shows may provide some stimulation for captive cetaceans, but these behaviours are conditioned and are usually exaggerated or altered versions of natural behaviour (WDC *et al.*, 2015). Conditioned behaviour observed in captivity include "tail-walking", the balancing of balls, spinning of hoops, trainers being pushed and pulled through the water and trainers seen riding on the backs of dolphins – **these are not natural behaviours**.
- **Use of tranquilizers:** Diazepam (Valium[®] and generics) is used by the captive dolphin industry **to control common problems in dolphinarium** which include stereotypies and anxiety, and also encourage feeding (Knight, 2013). The use of anti-anxiety drugs was recognised as 'mistreatment' by an Italian court in 2014 and the dolphinarium was closed. Industry claims that use halts infanticide are unsubstantiated.
- **Stress:** Handling, restraint, confinement, transport, isolation or crowding and an artificial diet lead to stress in captive cetaceans and, ultimately, **a reduction in their life expectancy** (WDC *et al.*, 2015).
- **Early mortality:** Captive bottlenose dolphins may live as long as wild dolphins in the best facilities, but their annual mortality rates are still slightly higher (5.6% vs 3.9%, although this difference is not statistically significant) and in many facilities around the world, significantly higher, as poor quality housing and care contribute to ill health (Small & DeMaster, 1995; Woodley *et al.*, 1997); captive orcas show reduced survivorship compared to wild orcas and live shorter lives (Small & DeMaster, 1995; Jett & Ventre, 2015). Beluga whales appear to live about half as long in captivity as they do in the wild (Stewart *et al.*, 2006). Of note, four dolphins have died in Bruges Dolphinarium since 2011. **Captive facilities are not self-sustaining** (Van Lint *et al.*, 2006).

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

- **Threats to wild populations:** Wild capture of cetaceans for the captive industry continues to be a threat to small, local populations (Reeves *et al.*, 2003; Fisher & Reeves, 2005). The dolphinarium in Romania acquired dolphins from China in 2010, which are thought to be from Japan's Taiji drive hunt. Trade data indicate that 288 live cetaceans were imported into the EU between 1979 and 2010, in spite of a prohibition under EU CITES Regulation 338/97 on imports of cetaceans for primarily commercial purposes.
- **Non-compliance with EC Zoos Directive:** EU dolphinarium, licensed as zoos, are required to contribute to species conservation, undertake scientific research to benefit the species in the wild and educate the public about cetaceans and their conservation. There is little evidence from the industry to support any species conservation claims; research is limited to addressing poor welfare caused by captivity and educational content in shows is often less than 12% (WDC *et al.*, 2015).
- **Dolphinarium-free States:** Thirteen Member States do not host dolphinarium. Slovenia, Cyprus and Croatia prohibit the keeping of cetaceans in captivity for commercial purposes, Hungary prohibits dolphin imports, whilst Greece has banned all animal performances.

COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS OR CENTERS FOR CONSERVATION?

- **Commercial enterprises:** the majority of captive dolphin facilities are represented by private, commercial companies, listing their animals as commercial assets and are focused on generating profit.

An average adult single entrance fee to a dolphinarium in the EU is €22. There is little evidence that any significant portion of this money is donated to *in-situ* species conservation (WDC *et al*, 2015).

- **Captive breeding and scientific research:** the majority of cetaceans in captivity are not endangered species and therefore there is no need to involve them in captive breeding programmes.
- **Stranded wild cetaceans,** who should be rehabilitated for release back to the wild, are taken into the captive dolphin industry where they are displayed for the remainder of their lives and used in breeding programmes (e.g. Morgan, the orca in a zoo in Tenerife).

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