

## CETACEANS IN CAPTIVITY

### CONTEXT

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#### Global situation

- At present, there are approximately 60 countries worldwide with more than 2000 cetaceans kept in captivity, mainly Delphinidae (bottlenose dolphins and killer whales) but also Phocoenidae (porpoises) and Monodontidae (beluga whales).
- Usually they are kept in zoos, aquariums and water parks but also in shopping centres, night clubs, hotels and even by the navy.
- The countries with highest numbers of captive cetaceans are Japan, China, United States, Mexico, Russia, Ukraine and Spain (in 7<sup>th</sup> position).
- In 2009 the documentary “The Cove”, that revealed the ritual of the dolphins slaughter in Taiji, Japan; and the documentary “Blackfish” in 2013, marked a change of public opinion in relation to dolphinariums. More and more organizations position themselves against cetaceans’ captivity and millions of people are mobilizing worldwide to shut down these centres.
- SeaWorld, the biggest company dedicated to this sector in the US, has been losing visitors and profit in recent years (PRNews, 2015). In March 2016, the company announced the end of its killer whale breeding programme and therefore, the orcas housed currently (among them there is Ulises, who lived in ‘Zoo de Barcelona’ from 1983 to 1994) will be the last kept by SeaWorld.

#### European outlook

- As a sign of the social and political relevance of the captive cetacean issue within Europe, a coalition named Dolphinarium-Free Europe, was launched in March 2015. The work of this coalition ensured that the topic of cetacean captivity was discussed by the Committee of Environment within the European Parliament for the very first time.
- Dolphinarium in Europe are regulated by the EU Zoos Directive, which requires them to contribute to areas of conservation, scientific research, public education and specific welfare needs of each species.
- Today there are 33 dolphinariums in the 15 member states of the EU who keep around 300 cetaceans in captivity.
- One of them, the *Särkänniemi dolphinarium* in Finland, the only in the country, announced its closure by the end of October 2015, due to the fact that public opinion is changing against captivity in Finland and so visitor numbers, and profit, have declined. The onward location of the four dolphins has yet to be decided.
- Proposals for the first dolphinarium in Poland, near to Warsaw (Mszczonów city) were stopped when authorities barred permissions in August 2015.

- The Rimini dolphinarium (Italy), was closed permanently in 2015 due to non-compliance with national regulation. Previously, in 2013, their 4 dolphins had been moved to Genova Aquarium following complaints of mistreatment.
- In the UK, the last dolphinarium closed in 1993 due to the establishment of highly restrictive additional standards for captive cetaceans.
- Slovenia, Cyprus and Croatia prohibit the keeping of cetaceans in captivity for commercial purposes.
- In Hungary there have been no dolphinariums since 2002 and the import of dolphins is forbidden as it is in Switzerland.
- Neither Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxemburg, Poland nor Slovakia keep cetaceans in captivity.

### Spain and Catalonia situation

- Spain is the European country with the highest number of dolphinariums: 11. What is more, in Lanzarote there is a project underway to build another dolphinarium, in a zoo called Rancho Texas Park.
- Catalonia hosts 3 of those dolphinariums, 2 in the province of Barcelona.

## PROBLEMS OF DOLPHINS IN CAPTIVITY

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### Overall

The majority of captive dolphins in the EU were born in captivity but they are still wild animal with inherent behaviours and the same welfare needs as those born in the wild. Captivity seriously compromises the welfare of large roaming carnivores (Club & Masson, 2003).

As shown in the report by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation (EU Zoo Inquiry, 2011), the majority of EU dolphinarium do not accomplish the requirements of the EU Zoos Directive.

- **Space restriction:** Even the largest facilities where dolphins are kept in captivity, are a tiny portion of the natural habitat of cetaceans (Tyack, 2009). When the space for wide roaming carnivores is reduced, they develop abnormal behaviours such as stereotypies and aggression (Club&Mason, 2003). These animals cannot escape if conflicts arise.
- **Limited social environment:** Keeping dolphins that are not related, or come from different areas, or are different species, in the same tank can provoke dominant aggressions and can lead to serious injury and even death of some individuals (Waples & Gales, 2002).
- **Environment without stimulus:** The majority of tanks have flat walls, are small and without stimulus. Some dolphinariums do not even have natural light orf circulation of fresh air (Couquiaud, 2005).
- **Noise:** The frequent and repetitive noises of engines, water filters and loud music can cause high levels of stress in cetaceans given that they do depend on their sense of

hearing, which is highly evolved (Couquiaud, 2005). Dolphins in captivity spend the majority of e time with their heads out of the water or near the waters surface so they are exposed to long periods of noise which can provoke psychological stress (Wright et al, 2007).

- **Behavioural restrictions:** The conditioned behaviours observed in captivity such as: hitting balls, jumping hoops, pushing trainers/people in the water are not natural behaviours (WDC et al, 2015). They are fed frozen fish in a regimented schedule and hence cannot carry out their natural hunting behavior. The use of sonar (Eco localization) is reduced owing to the lack of necessity.
- **Use of tranquilizers:** The use of Diazepam to control stereotypies and anxiety of dolphins is common (Knight, 2013).
- **Premature death:** Captive dolphins can live as long as dolphins in the wild when kept in optimum conditions. Yet mortality is still higher at most facilities because of inappropriate management (Woodley, 1997).
- **Threat to wild populations:** Captures of wild cetaceans for the captivity industry are a great threat for free living populations (Fisher&Reeves, 2005). For instance, in Taiji each year dolphin captures are permitted. Last season (2015-2016), 111 dolphins were captured for dolphinariums (Dolphin Project, 2016).
- **Reproduction:** The majority of cetaceans that are kept in captivity are not endangered and are of 'Least Concern' conservation status. Therefore there is no need to breed them in captivity. Many calves are also separated from their mothers in captivity which causes dreadful stress to the animals.

## The dolphins in Barcelona

In 'Zoo de Barcelona' live 6 dolphins (by the mid 2016 there will be 4):

- Anak, female captured in Cuba in 1989 at 3 years of age.
- Blau, male born in BCN in 1999, son of Moana and Inuk.
- Tumay, male born in BCN al 2002, son of Moana and Inuk.
- Leia, female born in BCN in 2003, daughter of Anak and Inuk.
- Kuni, male born in BCN in 2006, son of Anak and Inuk.
- Nuik, male born in BCN in 2012, son of Anak and Blau.

Since the dolphinarium at Barcelona zoo opened in 1965, 31 dolphins have died. For instance, in 2000 a female died leaving a calf 6 months old. Eighteen births have taken place at the dolphinarium of Zoo de Barcelona.

At present the dolphins are kept in two different groups. Each group has access to at least half of the dolphinarium space at different times. It was recently decided that the groups be restricted further by moving Kuni and Leia to Oceanogràfic, in Valencia, where they will used in circus-like performances and in breeding programs. The remaining 4 animals should then be

able to use the whole facility. In principle steps would also be taken to avoid continued breeding.

The facilities at Barcelona are not fit for the animals and it is impossible to ensure their welfare: two cement tanks of about 65m<sup>2</sup> separated by a small channel.

Up until November 16<sup>th</sup> 2015 performances with the dolphins took place daily. In a study carried in 2015 it was calculated that less than 16% of the show time was educational. The rest of the show time the animals spent doing tricks including jumping over ropes, waving their flippers, touching a ball or pushing trainers through the water.

Today, the dolphinarium remains open to the public. People can observe the dolphins but performances are no longer permitted or performed.

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