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Ban on reproduction would undermine critical role of zoological parks

Successful breeding, research and husbandry for more than thirty years have led to a thriving and self-sustaining population of bottlenose dolphins in zoological parks that have inspired and educated millions of people. This success has eliminated the need to collect dolphins from the wild. Knowing this, the campaign groups that oppose the keeping of cetaceans and other charismatic animals in zoological parks are pursuing a new strategy to convince politicians wherever possible to enact bans on breeding of cetaceans in zoological parks to achieve their ultimate aim, which is to close all zoos and aquariums.

Prohibiting reproduction is unwise and contrary to the best interests of the cetaceans already in zoological settings. Breeding is a vital part of an animal's life. Reproduction and the associated behaviors is an indication that animals are healthy, thriving, and compatible. Natural behavior undeniably includes not only mating but the rearing of calves.

A government-imposed ban on reproduction could only be accomplished by permanent separation of the sexes or permanent use of contraceptive drugs. Permanent separation of the sexes would disrupt existing social groups and could lead to social and welfare problems for individual animals. Permanent chemical contraception could have serious impacts on the health and welfare of the female dolphins. While use of medical contraception under veterinary supervision can be appropriate, the impacts of long-term, or in this case, permanent, use of contraceptives in cetaceans are not yet well understood. Further, a ban on reproduction paired with a ban on import of companion animals from other zoos means that the number of animals will decrease over time, resulting in the extinction of the ex situ population. This also will prevent parks from maintaining well-functioning social groups and result in eventual isolation of animals with negative welfare effects.

A ban also would prevent the French parks from fulfilling key functions of zoological parks. Zoological parks must optimize genetic diversity and maintain sufficient populations to serve current and future conservation needs; to maximize scientific research and continue building public knowledge of marine mammals and concern for their conservation in the wild. Studies of cetacean reproduction and calf development in human care have provided important scientific advances that have assisted rescued animals and have the potential to be used in the field to protect endangered populations. A ban on breeding is the beginning of the end of this body of knowledge. Raising calves in marine parks and aquariums also provides the knowledge and practical, hands-on skills for rescued and stranded cetaceans.

Today, it is charismatic species such as dolphins that attract millions of visitors to zoological parks, enabling them to fulfill their education roles and secure funding to support their critical conservation work. In future, it may be necessary to call upon zoological parks to establish breeding programs for the specific purpose of restoring certain populations of species – possibly even bottlenose dolphins - that may become endangered.

An international organization dedicated to conservation through public display, education, and research.



Living animals require a substantial commitment of resources and thoughtful management. Dolphins, which live long and healthy lives in zoological parks, certainly cannot be appropriately managed using short-term strategies. Zoological parks should be supported, not thwarted, in their work to maintain genetically diverse populations, good welfare, and long-term sustainability. The marine mammal parks and professionals of the Alliance call upon France to re-consider its decision in light of its clear negative welfare and conservation implications.

The Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (the Alliance) is an international association with offices in Washington D.C. and Brussels, Belgium representing marine life parks, aquariums, research facilities and professional organizations dedicated to the highest standards of care for marine mammals and to their conservation in the wild. The Alliance's membership includes top quality public display facilities for marine mammal species in the Americas, Asia and Europe. The Alliance is a long-standing International Observer to the Convention on Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) and a recognized Partner of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Its associated professionals have provided expert input concerning species conservation and anthropogenic impacts to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Whaling Commission's Small Cetaceans Committee.

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