



Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Internationaler Artenschutz des NABU

Heike Finke

Thomas Cook Group plc  
Dr. Peter Fankhauser  
Group CEO  
United Kingdom

Re: Position of Thomas Cook on keeping orcas at Loro Parque and at SeaWorld

Dear Dr. Fankhauser:

As committed members of the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Internationaler Artenschutz des NABU (Federal Work Group on the International Protection of Species of the Nature Preservation Association of Germany), the largest nature preservation association in Germany with more than 660,000 members and sponsors, we are contacting you to express our great concern.

As passionate defenders of nature and animals, we find your decision indicating that Thomas Cook no longer wishes to sell tickets for the SeaWorld parks as well as Loro Parque on Tenerife, also committed to the protection of nature, species and animals, starting in 2019, impossible to understand.

It is with good reason that NABU signed a cooperation document with the VDZ (Verband der Zoologischen Gärten e.V., German Zoo Association) and LPF (Loro Parque Fundacion) many years ago. We focus on environmental education because we are convinced that people only want to protect what they know and love. Loro Parque, with over a million visitors a year, has made it its mission to get people excited about animals and the environment and to inspire them to show greater commitment to the issue. However, this cannot succeed if Thomas Cook demonises institutions that are intensely involved with responsible animal keeping that gives people a perspective of the lives of the animals and forcefully point out the necessity of protecting them.

Not so long ago, orcas were denigrated as "killer whales" and we are certain that presentation of these charismatic animals in the sea parks played an important role in changing people's minds. We are also aware that flagrant errors have been made in this area in the past, both in terms of catching and keeping the animals. However, in modern, responsibly run facilities such as Loro Parque such things no longer occur. "Nature captures" should not occur and poor keeping practices should also definitely be stopped.

A few words on the shows: "Killer whales" are not killers at all but rather highly intelligent, social beings. Loro Parque has been able to demonstrate this for years. The basis for the shows is a relationship with the orcas based on trust where the orcas love their trainers and they are loved by the trainers! This activity keeps the animals physically and emotionally healthy. In addition, the orcas are made familiar with medical procedures that make medical tests and treatment even possible in an emergency (e.g. blood tests, ultrasound). Except for "Morgan", heavily impaired by hearing problems and rescues from the North Sea in 2010 half-starved, all orcas in Loro Parque have been in human care for the second and third generation - they would not manage themselves in nature. "Keiko" is a very vivid example - despite intensive efforts, it did not survive its release into the wild. What should be done with the animals? In our opinion, there is nothing wrong with environmental training as long as the animals are optimally provided for and they are doing well.

Unser BAG-Gründungsmitglied Wolfgang Rades war mehrere Jahre als Zoologischer Direktor im Loro Parque tätig und hatte täglich intensiven Einblick in die Haltung und das Wohlergehen der Meeressäuger im Loro Parque. It is particularly for this reason that he become a committed supporter of keeping orcas there. We are speaking from our own experience when it is regarding this topic.

It is estimated that there are only 50,000 orcas left in the wild. A lack of food (e.g. populations in British Columbia) and toxins that result in fertility disorders etc. have a huge effect on the wild populations. We still know very little about these animals to be able to effectively help here. Discoveries that we make here due to the research on orcas in the sea parks can help the wild orcas to survive. For example, we know the gestation period of the animals. But we still do not know a lot: A major mystery for us, for example, remains the sound system of the orcas, which is among the most complex among marine mammals. Outdoor research has shown, for example, that orcas develop regional dialects but the details on their development and specific usage can only be discovered and understood with close contact with the animals.

Zoos that are run in a contemporary and scientifically-based manner are visited by more than 700 million people annually. They are the driving force not only for important research but are also the third largest source of funds in the world for nature and animal preservation projects with revenue of more than USD 350 million annually. Loro Parque itself provides approximately USD one million for significant nature and species preservation projects (also for the protection of orcas in situ) via its nature preservation foundation!

We would like to emphasise that we would greatly welcome the commitment and responsible action of travel companies such as Thomas Cook in regard to animal, nature and species protection (particularly as part of the ABTA guidelines, according to which Loro Parque was just certified last year and did perfectly well with 100%).

That is why we would strongly request, Dr. Fankhauser, to carefully reflect on and review your decision regarding Loro Parque and SeaWorld.

Sincerely,

on behalf of Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Internationaler Artenschutz at NABU,

Heike Finke

(Spokesperson of the Federal Association of International Species Preservation, NABU committee member and attorney)