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PRESS RELEASE

5 February 2004

Acres investigation into Underwater World Singapore dolphins is proven right

SINGAPORE 5 FEBRUARY - The Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA), in a meeting with Acres on 20 January 2004 revealed that it had made a genuine mistake in processing the application for the import of six Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins (*Sousa chinensis*) by the Underwater World Singapore (UWS). AVA mistakenly classified all of the dolphins as captive bred. It has now been confirmed that only two of the six endangered dolphins were captive bred and the rest were caught from the wild. This contradicted earlier claims by UWS, Sentosa Development Corporation and AVA that the dolphins were captive bred.

According to our understanding, UWS had left Section 8 (source of animal) of the application form for CITES permit and certificate blank. UWS, however, knew that some of the dolphins were wild-caught and had informed AVA of this, prior to the permit approval. AVA has now said that it will make the corresponding correction on its annual Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) report.

This revelation proves Acres' claim that most of the dolphins at UWS were caught from the wild is right. Our investigation, which brought us as far as Thailand, was based on factual evidence and data. As an organisation that stresses on education and carrying out scientific research to support more consideration to animals, Acres does not make unsubstantiated claims.

UWS, which aims to play an important role in education, appears to have misinformed the public. As of 4 February 2004, its website continues to maintain that all the dolphins currently at Dolphin Lagoon are captive bred.

Furthermore, as a conservation-oriented organisation, UWS acquired wild caught dolphins from Thailand. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has reported with regard to the Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins that "the demand for live specimens in Thai oceanaria has recently led to the development of a directed fisheries there and that the Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins are no longer present in large parts of their former home range in inshore waters of Thailand."

Given that the current CITES permits for the dolphins at UWS are invalid, AVA and the Thailand Fishery Department will be issuing new import and export permits. However, the CITES Convention text, Article III Para 2 states that "an export permit shall only be granted when the following conditions have been met: (a) a Scientific Authority of the State of export has been advised that such export will not be detrimental to the survival of that species". Based on the IUCN report, the export of wild caught dolphins is clearly detrimental to the survival of this species.

Acres urges both Singapore and Thailand authorities not to issue permits for the wild caught dolphins acquired by UWS and ask for the repatriation of these dolphins back to Thailand. We also want to reiterate that keeping sensitive and highly intelligent animals like dolphins in captivity will cause them great mental stress. One of UWS's dolphins caught from the wild had already died of acute gastritis, a stress-induced illness.

Acres would like to thank AVA for working with us towards the common goal of greater welfare to animals. Acres will continue with the public awareness campaign and call for the three remaining wild dolphins at UWS to be released back to where they belong.

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Notes to editors

1. Founded by a group of Singaporeans in 2001, Acres is a non-profit organisation aimed at fostering respect and compassion for all animals. Acres's approach to raising animal welfare issue is to focus on education and back up our advocacy with scientific clarity accrued through research. Using our findings, we will inform the public and work towards synergistic partnerships with the authorities and related parties to improve animal welfare.
2. Acres launched the 'Suffering, not Smiling' campaign in September 2003. The campaign aims to raise awareness on the plight of captive dolphins and secure the freedom of the dolphins currently held in captivity at Dolphin Lagoon, Underwater World Singapore.
3. The 'Suffering, not Smiling' campaign is supported by 45 worldwide organizations and 9 385 people.