

12 November 2011

Animal rights group seeks release of Ocean Park Dolphins

By Penelope P. Endozo

MANILA, Philippines—An international animal welfare group urged the Philippines on Saturday to free the 25 dolphins at Ocean Park in Subic that are being groomed to be among the next big attractions at a Singapore marine park.

Animal Concerns Research and Education Society of Singapore (ACRES) executive director Louis Ng launched a petition addressed to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to “rescue” the dolphins, an endangered species, and return them to their place of origin in the Solomon Islands.

Ng said the 27 bottlenose dolphins were caught in the waters of Solomon Islands in Oceania, near Papua New Guinea in 2008 to be part of Resorts World Sentosa’s new marine show in Singapore.

The group asked the Philippine government not to re-export the marine animals to handlers in Singapore in support of international calls to stop the trafficking of dolphins.

“We ask the Philippine government to do the right thing. The 25 dolphins in Subic should not be re-exported to Singapore and instead should be set free and sent back to the Solomon Islands,” said Ng.

Out of 27 dolphins captured, two died while in Langkawi, Malaysia and the rest were taken to Subic for “training” while the marine park in Singapore was under construction.

In May, ACRES and US-based group Earth Island Institute (IIE) launched a campaign to stop the trafficking of dolphins. The group has already garnered 680,000 signatures worldwide and has started an online petition in the Philippines at www.saddestdolphins.com.

Ng explained that dolphins are highly-social marine animals and long-distance swimmers. When imprisoned in cages or tanks, they could die—or commit suicide.

“Dolphins travel and swim a distance of 113 kilometers in 10 days, imagine if you were in the dolphin’s situation and your world has shrunk to a square sea pen,” Ng said at a press conference.

Ng, a marine researcher and biology expert who graduated from the National University of Singapore, cited scientific studies from the Union for the Conservation of Nature to show that dolphins are not as “adaptable” as other marine animals featured in parks.

“The dolphins don’t do well in sea tanks. In some cases when they are caged, they even commit suicide. They don’t breathe and go underwater until they die,” Ng said.

“While captured, they are housed in an alien environment and fed with dead fish as reward. Worse part is that they have to perform to be fed. If they don’t do a trick, they won’t be properly fed,” added Ng.

Ng said that the Solomon Islands government has passed a law banning the hunting and trafficking of dolphins starting January 2012. Other countries such as Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico have followed suit.

Ng said that all marine parks in the United Kingdom no longer feature dolphin shows in support of international laws.

“Marine parks in UK are still profitable even without dolphins. We had a dialogue with the RWS managers, but they did not listen to us. Western countries are starting to pick up what we’re lobbying, we hope the Philippines will take the lead in Asia,” said Ng.

The group, in a letter addressed to Agriculture Secretary Proceso Alcala, stressed that dolphins are categorized as “endangered species” by the BFAR.

ACRES has put up an exhibit at Bonifacio High Street, Taguig City and is set to go on an educational tour starting at Ateneo de Manila University on November 17-18; University of the Philippines on November 24-25; and De la Salle University on November 21 to 26.