

Yahoo News

22 November 2011

RWS insists it will not hold animal shows

By Faris Mokhtar

The Marine Life Park on Tuesday insisted it would not conduct animal shows when the Sentosa oceanarium opens its doors to the public next year.

Its comments came after an animal welfare group urged the park, which is managed by casino-hotel operator Resorts World Sentosa, to set the record straight on whether animal shows will be among its programme line-up.

The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres) raised the questions after it filmed trainers introducing hoops and basketballs to dolphins during its visit to the Ocean Adventure facility in the Philippines on 14 November.

In an email to RWS' chief executive officer Tan Hee Teck on Monday, a copy of which was shared with Yahoo! Singapore, Acres executive director Louis Ng said using the equipments on dolphins is something which it found "highly unusual".

He also questioned whether the integrated resort is misleading the public since it has made repeated calls that the shows will not take place.

Responding to this, a Marine Life Park's spokesman emphasised it has "no plans" to conduct animal shows.

"As part of caring for our marine mammals, the Marine Life Park team has introduced various enrichment devices that are water resistant, durable and safe for our animals," he told Yahoo! Singapore.

"Dolphins in the wild are often in search of opportunities to interact and play. In zoological environments, balls and hoops encourage play activities among dolphins. These activities promote health and social interaction among the animals."

that its dolphins are in "good health", the park remains committed to play a part in marine conservation, education and research.

However, Ng countered the park's response saying that dolphins do not play with basketballs and hula hoops in the wild.

"Why is there a need to train the dolphins to exhibit their 'natural skills'? The only training required is when they are needed to perform tricks, which is not natural to them?" he questioned.

Meanwhile, refuting Acres' claims that the dolphins are housed in small enclosures, the park said they are placed in a "well-established" facility in the Philippines, comprising a veterinary clinic, marine mammal clinical diagnostic laboratory and enclosures.

Currently, the dolphins are housed there and will be transported to RWS once a similar facility has been set up. The standards in the facility, said the spokesman, exceed the requirements set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums.

Responding to the group's allegations that they were not allowed to film the dolphins and asked to leave the premise, the park's spokesman said, "The area where our dolphins are housed is restricted for safety and security reasons."

In 2008, RWS bought 27 Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins from the Solomon Islands as one of its main attractions in its Marine Life Park, slated to be the world's largest oceanarium when it opens.

However, there have been persistent calls for the release of the dolphins since two died in captivity in Langkawi last year due to a water-borne bacterial infection known as Melioidosis.

But the resort then said that the infection also affects mammals in the wild and not from training.

In the middle of this year, dolphin activist Barbara Napoles created the petition "Please Help Free the "Sentosa 25" from Resorts World in Sentosa Singapore" which has garnered worldwide support.

In September, the integrated resort also temporarily suspended postings on its Facebook page after it was flooded by critical comments calling for the dolphins to be freed.

Activist Richard O' Barry who starred in the Oscar Award-winning documentary "The Cove" also called on the resort to release the dolphins in a public dialogue organised by Acres in October.