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### **RWS: Our dolphins are in a well-established facility in the Philippines**

*By Khrysta Imperial Rara, VERA Files*

The 25 dolphins from the Solomon Islands that are now in Subic are well-cared for and free to interact with each other, according to Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) in Singapore.

In a statement sent to Yahoo/VERA Files in reaction to the article "Animal groups seek return of Solomon dolphins in Subic to their native habitat," Lim Soon Hua, RWS director for communications, said their dolphins currently in the Philippines are in a "facility which comes with a dedicated veterinary clinic, a marine mammal clinical diagnostic laboratory and enclosures that exceed international standards such as those set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums."

The RWS-owned Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops aduncus*) are temporarily kept in Ocean Adventure, an open-water marine park in the Subic Bay Freeport zone, about 100 km northwest of Manila Bay.

Lim said "The area where our dolphins are housed is restricted for safety and security reasons."

Lim also said the wild-caught cetaceans have " ample space to swim, interact and bond with their fellow pod mates and are cared for by our team of veterinarians and marine mammal specialists who collectively represent over 300 years of relevant experience working in more than 60 marine mammal facilities globally".

"Our Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins were acquired according to Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) requirements. The movement of marine animals, including dolphins, is governed by the United Nations Environment Programme which upholds the policies of CITES. The species of dolphins that will be housed at the Marine Life Park are not classified as endangered, nor are they threatened with extinction," he further said.

Lim said "We have always maintained that there are 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. 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."

He said the Marine Life Park opens in 2012, and stressed, "We believe it will have a role in inspiring and promoting marine conservation."

On Nov.12, several animal protection groups, among them Singapore's Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), Earth Island Institute (EII) and the Philippine Welfare Society (PAWS) launched the "Save the World's Saddest Dolphins" campaign at the Bonifacio Global City in Taguig. They called on the Philippine government to ban the re-export of the dolphins to the RWS Marine Life Park in Singapore and return them to Solomon Islands, their native habitat.

They went to Subic on Nov. 14 to see for themselves the condition of the dolphins.

Louis Ng, a biologist and executive director of Singapore charity Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), said the group saw and filmed the trainers using basketballs and hula-hoops during the training. "We are puzzled by this as RWS has always maintained that they have no plans for animal shows," he said.

Trixie Concepcion, Regional Director of Earth Island Institute doubts RWS' claim that the facility where the dolphins are being kept is truly a 'well established facility'.

"The Ocean Adventure Park which houses the dolphins has had 4 out of its 5 false killer whales die in just a few years of operation. All four false killer whales were all juveniles and died before they were sexually mature," she said.

"Moreover," she said, " Ocean Adventure has been sued for the violation of the Environmental Impact Statement System of the Philippines (PD 1586) as well as the violation of the Animal Welfare Act (RA 8485), a well established facility, indeed!"

Concepcion disagrees that the method RWS used to obtain the dolphins conforms to CITES requirements. She said the export of dolphins from the Solomon Islands was put under the Review of Significant Trade in the Animals Committee of CITES in 2008 due to the issue of sustainability.

"In that meeting in 2008, the Solomon Islands government committed to stopping the export of dolphins if it was proven to be unsustainable. This September 2011, the government of the Solomon Islands announced that all dolphin exports will be banned starting January 2012, an admission that the past dolphin hunts have been largely unregulated and unsustainable," Concepcion noted.

Concepcion said that in their talks with the Philippine government pertinent authorities, nobody could verify the present condition of the 25 dolphins. "They could not even tell us if all 25 dolphins are alive," she said.

(VERA Files is put out by veteran journalists taking a deeper look at current issues. Vera is Latin for "true.")