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### **Acres again seeks meeting with RWS**

by Andrew Loh

In its latest attempt to resolve the controversy surrounding the fate of 25 dolphins scheduled to be exhibited at Resorts World Sentosa's (RWS) Marine Life Park, activists opposed to this have again written to RWS seeking a meeting about the matter.

The 25 wild-caught Indo-pacific bottlenose dolphins from the Solomon Islands are currently being housed at Subic Bay in the Philippines.

In its letter dated 1 October, the non-governmental group – Animal Concerns, Research and Education Society (Acres) – asked to meet with senior representatives from RWS on 3 October. This followed its letter two days earlier to the Chief Executive Director of RWS, Mr Tan Hee Teck, to request the same.

Signed off by its Executive Director, Mr Louis Ng, Acres said it will also be accompanied to the meeting by Mr Richard O'Barry from the Earth Island Institute. Mr O'Barry has lent his support to the opposition to RWS's actions and has called on it to release the dolphins.

"We have also yet to receive a reply to the letter sent to you by Mr Richard O'Barry from Earth Island Institute dated 28 May 2011 and resent on 8 June 2011," Mr Ng wrote in his letter to Mr Tan.

Incidentally, Mr O'Barry will be at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel on 4 October, Tuesday, for a dialogue session with the public. The event is organised by campaigners to save the dolphins. More than 400 people have signed up for the event so far. You can register [here](#).

RWS has so far refused to meet with Acres this year or to engage it in any meaningful way to resolve the matter. The two sides last met in December last year during which Acres expressed its concerns regarding the death of two of the original 27 dolphins.

RWS seems to have ignored similar concerns for the remaining 25 dolphins and seems to have gone ahead with its plans for the dolphins at its Marine Life Park (MLP). "The MLP will be the world's largest oceanarium when it opens in 2012, housing over 100,000 fishes in over 55 million litres of water," RWS said.

On 27 September, it held a press conference where it revealed "plans to double the number of keepers to 36 to provide care for its dolphins at its upcoming Marine Life Park." It further said that it "had already hired 18 dolphin keepers since last year." (Straits Times)

In response to RWS's "20 facts" about the MLP which was reported in the media, Acres released its own "20 truths about the Marine Life Park and dolphins in human care." One of the issues it rebutted was RWS's claims that "[At] all our facilities – Subic, Langkawi and later the MLP – the space for our dolphins to swim around well exceed international accreditation standards."

"RWS misled the public," Acres said. "The enclosures housing the RWS wild-caught dolphins were rusty. RWS denied this and stated that 'ACRES chose, in pictures it used for campaigning, to highlight

rust on the side of a boardwalk next to the enclosures. This picture is not reflective of the facility when it was in operation.' RWS' statement was proved to be false after photos were released by ACRES showing the rusty enclosures with dolphins in them when the facility was in operation. RWS has acknowledged that their other statement 'enclosures were more than double the size of what ACRES had indicated' was false."

An undercover investigation conducted by Acres earlier "revealed that enclosures used to house the wild-caught dolphins in Langkawi failed to meet the European Association for Aquatic Mammals Standards for Establishments Housing Bottlenose Dolphins." (Acres report.)

The tussle between RWS and Acres have attracted global attention, with major news media channel picking up on the story. Its online petition on Avaaz.org to "save the world's saddest dolphins" has garnered almost 700,000 signatures.

"For wild dolphins captivity is torture, their powerful sonar bounces off the walls back at them -- as if they are trapped in an endless house of mirrors," the petition said. "Most die young from stress induce illness, but some even commit suicide. If the wealthy Resorts World Sentosa succeeds in keeping them captive then half the dolphins will die in the first 2 years -- and it will legitimise the widely banned practice of capturing dolphins in the wild. We can't let that happen -- let's use our voices to set them free."

In Singapore, Acres continue to raise awareness about the plight of the dolphins. In its latest campaign, members and volunteers will be in the heartlands to garner support. On Saturday and Sunday, they will be at Hougang Mall from 11am to 9pm. Next week, Acres will take to the heart of Singapore's shopping district – at 313 Orchard. (Visit its Facebook page for details.)

These followed its event at Speakers' Corner in August where more than a thousand people turned up to show support for its campaign. The event was titled, "Resorts World, Please Let The Dolphins Go."