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Captive dolphins won't die when freed: Activist

By Sophie Hong

Dolphins in captivity can still survive in the wild when they are released, said prominent dolphin activist Richard O'Barry yesterday in Singapore.

The American, who wrote in to Resorts World Sentosa a few months ago to free the 25 bottlenose dolphins it plans to showcase at its Marine Life Park, was responding to comments by the integrated resort (IR) in a Straits Times report yesterday.

On the issue of the dolphins, the Sentosa IR had said that the track record for reintroducing captured dolphins into the wild "is patchy at best" and that "we will be gravely irresponsible to even consider that".

But Mr O'Barry said yesterday: "Resorts World Sentosa said (they) can't release dolphins into the wild, but we did so in Georgia. Those dolphins had spent about seven years in captivity."

He was speaking to over 500 people at a dialogue organised by the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres).

Mr O'Barry, a marine-mammal specialist, was featured in 2009's Academy Award-winning documentary on Japan's dolphin-hunting activities, *The Cove*.

He said yesterday that he did not have data on how many dolphins in captivity have been successfully released back into the wild, but added that "out of all the dolphins I have released so far, there were only two that failed". He has released over 25 dolphins.

When contacted, a spokesman for the Marine Life Park reiterated its stance and said that Mr O'Barry "is fully aware" of the track record for releasing captured dolphins.

"Mr O'Barry has no jurisdiction in Singapore. We believe that our dolphins will play a significant and meaningful role for marine conservation," he said, adding that dolphins in the wild or captivity can provide marine experts with "immense knowledge and experience".

The spokesman added that "we respect divergent views" and "will always welcome Acres to work with us on conservation programmes".