

TODAY

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Dolphin catcher-turned-activist nets audience of 500

By Esther Ng

SINGAPORE - About 500 people attended animal welfare group ACRES' first public dialogue session with former dolphin catcher-turned-activist Ric O'Barry at Grand Copthorne Waterfront last night.

The mainly youthful crowd, comprising teachers, students and young adult professionals and a few Caucasians, gave Mr O'Barry, who starred in the Academy Award-winning documentary film *The Cove*, a standing ovation. They also listened intently to the presentation by Animal Concerns Research & Education Society's (ACRES) executive director Louis Ng.

But the public debate was a one-sided affair with nary a soul speaking up in support of the captivity and display of dolphins in marine life parks.

Student Felicia Koh said she had written letters to the Government asking that Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) not put the dolphins on display. Ms Koh pointed out that the Monterey Bay Aquarium in California, which does not have dolphins, is "lovely" and proof that an attraction could be successful without dolphins that have been caught in the wild.

When a participant asked whether dolphins could be happy in captivity, Mr O'Barry said: "You're dealing with an optical illusion - the dolphin is smiling - which is nature's greatest deception, unless you hit them with a baseball bat, you wouldn't see the abuse."

Designer Nicholas Lim, 25, asked whether ACRES or Mr O'Barry would have any objections if RWS used dolphins bred in captivity.

Mr O'Barry said: "There is no reason why dolphins should be bred in captivity. It's a form of bad education."