

## **The Online Citizen**

07 October 2011

### **Ric O'Barry: We can save the planet by controlling our Desires**

*By Elisabeth Aruldoss*

ACRES hosted an open dialogue session with influential dolphin activist, Mr Ric O'Barry, on 4th October at the Grand Copthorne Hotel. The event saw a successful turn-out as a long line of eager people started queuing up in front of the conference hall, anticipating the start of the session.

Video clips of spirited dolphins roaming free in the oceans, messages from celebrities pleading against captivity, and a sombre message from popular primatologist, Jane Goodall, captivated the audience of about 1000 as they took their seats while anxiously awaiting the arrival of Mr O' Barry.

A standing ovation by the excited audience indicated the arrival of Mr O' Barry as he made his way down the aisle, at approximately 7.30pm.

The evening started off with a brief but informative presentation by Acres' President, Mr Louis Ng. In his presentation, Mr Ng explained the plight of the captive dolphins and emphasized the importance of public awareness. Mr Ng also expressed concern for the questions that they have been profusely asking Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) for a few months, which have not been answered to date.

Mr Ng added that, "Every single thing about captivity is artificial for them", and informed the audience of a report commissioned by the Solomon Islands government which indicated that bottlenose dolphins (that were tracked) swam 113km in 10 days. He went on to question the audience whether they can provide that sort of environment in captivity.

Mr Ng also echoed famous zoologist, Mark Carwardine, who said, "Anyone who says it is okay to keep dolphins in captivity is a liar or unbelievably naive. And it's totally wrong – morally and ethically – to swim with captive dolphins."

Mr Ng ended his presentation by urging the audience to be active in the petition to save the dolphins and to spread awareness before finally welcoming Mr Ric O' Barry onto the stage to begin the dialogue session.

**"You can have a successful aquarium without having live dolphins."**

During the dialogue, a young participant asked "Is there anything more that students or school communities can do to help this cause apart from signing the petition". Mr O' Barry replied that finding out who will get involved is exactly the purpose of the session. Mr Ng interjected, adding that Acres will persevere until the dolphins are released.

Mr Ng also reiterated that students can play their part by spreading awareness. He said "Go to our website '[saddestdolphins.com](http://saddestdolphins.com)'; there is a Facebook icon, click it to like the [Facebook page](#)".

"What more can we do with the government?", another concerned participant asked, "I have written letters to them and they haven't replied. There are perfect examples like the Monterey Bay Aquarium that teaches you how to be sustainable and it doesn't have dolphins". She added that the government of Singapore should realize what a bad shadow the captivity of dolphins is casting on

our nation. "It (The government) should worry about what people think of Singapore", she expressed.

At the mention of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, situated in California on the Pacific Ocean Shoreline, Mr O'Barry quickly responded that, "It is proof that you can have a successful aquarium without having live dolphins. There are many dolphins there and they are hanging from the ceiling made of plastic".

He also stated that the external anatomy of the captive dolphin is the only thing that is similar to that of the wild dolphin, as he continued to inform the audience, "In captivity, their behaviour is so radically altered, the educational value is highly questionable."

Mr O'Barry then complained, "How you get to the decision makers is the problem." and joked, "You are always dealing with somebody at lower level and these guys are upstairs hiding under their desks."

"How would you convince people who think that whale watching as an alternative would be too expensive?" another participant asked.

"A journalist was saying, 'If the dolphins weren't here, the kids wouldn't get to see the dolphins'. The reality is, you can't always get what you want", pausing briefly for the interruption of applause Mr O'Barry continued, "The very same children would not get to see a snow leopard. Does that mean that we have to go to the Himalayas and drag a snow leopard here?"

"Do we teach our children to control their desires. I think that's the most important thing in saving this planet – controlling our desires" , he emphasised.

Mr O' Barry ended the dialogue by saying, "In a world where so much that is wild and free has already been lost to us, we must leave these beautiful animals free to swim as they will and must. They do us no harm and wish us none, and we should let them alone."

### **Various alternatives in place of a dolphin show**

As an aspiring wildlife conservationist, I feel that this event was an important one that helped answer many burning questions related to dolphin captivity and shed more light on the issue. The public needs to be aware that Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) is a company that depends on consumer demand. Singaporean consumers, have the power to control the demand of ticket sales and we can help by not buying a ticket or not getting involved in any attraction with captive dolphins.

There are indeed various alternatives in place of a dolphin show. RWS is already earning billions and I think they are fairly capable of thriving without a dolphin attraction. The question that constantly frustrates me is "why would RWS still insist on carrying on with the dolphin exhibition when so many are clearly against it?"

Ric O' Barry's wise words – controlling our desires- struck me as something that should be crucial to humans. We humans have consumed and destroyed too much of our fragile earth and the only way towards a sustainable world is to live by these words.

We cannot always do as we please and these dolphins are best left alone in their natural habitat.

Many people, who have already tried writing letters to no avail, have raised questions about what else they can do since RWS has not displayed the decency to respond to them.

Is the government also a party to this as they were the authority which awarded the preferred contract to RWS (Genting Highlands) which asserted that the dolphin exhibition should be one of their attractions?

If so, the best way to pressure the government would be to create awareness, to get more Singaporean involved in the issue and to action their involvement by writing letters to appropriate government agencies, their Members of Parliament, and even to our Prime Minister.