

My Paper

11th August 2011

IR's dolphin plan faces global heat

By David Lim

The number of animal lovers, here and abroad, opposing Resort's World Sentosa's (RWS') plan to showcase 25 wild-caught bottlenose dolphins at its upcoming Marine Life Park (MLP) has spiked.

Two United States-based activist websites, Avaaz.org and Change.org have collectively garnered more than 780,000 signatures globally in two separate petitions over the past two months.

They are part of a movement that is pushing RWS to free the dolphins caught off the Solomon Islands, located east of Papua New Guinea.

RWS bought the dolphins between 2008 and 2009 and is currently housing them in Ocean Adventure Park in Subic Bay in the Philippines, while awaiting MLP's opening next year.

Singapore animal-protection group, Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres), also launched an online campaign in May and now has a following of more than 14,000 supporters.

Speaking to *my paper* yesterday, Acres executive director Louis Ng said: "There are already dolphins at the Dolphin Lagoon in Sentosa, so why do we want to duplicate attractions?"

Mr Ng also stressed that the campaign is not to lobby for the closure of the MLP but "for the release of animals that don't do well in captivity".

Yesterday, Asia for Animals, an alliance of 10 international organisations including Acres and the Britain-based Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, addressed an open letter to RWS, asking it to prove that dolphins can "thrive in marine parks".

An RWS spokesman had previously told Acres that releasing the dolphins into the wild "would be gravely irresponsible", as they have been in human care for three years. The spokesman cited the "patchy track record of marine mammal releases".

Yesterday, an MLP spokesman told *my paper*: "Any allegations that our dolphins are 'in peril' and subject to 'animal cruelty' are completely false. Our dolphins are healthy and residing in a facility that is safe and conducive to their health and well-being.

"We exceed stringent (standards set out in) international regulations to ensure that our dolphins have space to exercise, socialise, rest and grow healthily".

The spokesman added that the dolphins have become used to human care and "we are confident they will continue to thrive".