

## Singapore Scene

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### **Presidential candidates share views on dolphin captivity**

*By Alicia Won*

Two of the four Presidential candidates have expressed support for a campaign calling for Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) to release its 25 dolphins which are kept in captivity.

Animal rights group Animal Concerns, Research & Education Society (Acres) issued a statement on Thursday saying that it had contacted the candidates on 15 August for their views on RWS' plans to house 25 wild-caught dolphins.

Supporting Acres' cause, Dr Tan Cheng Bock told Acres, "As an animal lover, I hope that animals born in the wild should not be confined for entertainment. They are born free, let them stay free."

Tan Jee Say also supported the animal right group. He said, "I take good interest in the care of dolphins and call for more volunteers for this good cause of Acres and would offer my support as part of my message platform of compassion, empathy and conscience."

However, the other two Presidential candidates were more neutral in their response.

"The decision on what is the correct thing to do is a difficult one," said Tan Kin Lian. He noted that dolphins released back into the wild face danger of being accidentally captured or killed by fishing fleets.

"On the other hand if they are moved into Marine Life Park, they would lose their freedom and be caged in an artificial environment. While the dolphins might be safe from physical harm, they might not be happy in their environment," he noted.

Tan Kin Lian urged Acres and RWS to "approach the matter with a positive attitude".

"Both ACRES and RWS have similar goals of marine conservation, research and education. They should work together to come up with a solution where the dolphins are safe from physical harm and at the same time have happy, meaningful lives," he said.

Dr Tony Tan told Acres on 20 August that the issue should be looked into.

"We should be concerned about animal welfare and biodiversity. I know that Acres is very passionate about the dolphin issue and this is something we should look into," he said.

Between 2008 and 2009, RWS purchased 27 wild-caught Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins from the Solomon Islands. Two of them died last year while undergoing training in Langkawi. The rest are now kept in the Philippines and will eventually be transferred to RWS.

Acres' executive director Louis Ng, a biologist, noted that marine mammal specialist Ric O'Bary has raised the possibility of setting up a rehabilitation and release project for the 25 dolphins, in conjunction with RWS.

"Acres is confident that any animal will choose freedom over captivity if given a choice," said Ng.

When contacted, RWS senior vice president for communications Krist Boo said, "We respectfully invite the Presidential candidates to hear what the Marine Life Park is about when their hectic campaigns are over, and wish them all the best."

She said the MLP is "unequivocal in our commitment to meet international standards of care, husbandry and facility for all our marine animals, including our 25 dolphins".

The dolphins, which have been under RWS' care for three years, have acclimated to human care and "we are confident they will continue to thrive", she added.

"Our door is open to individuals and animal groups that can contribute constructively to marine conservation," said Boo.

RWS invites the public to read its blog to find out more about how it cares for the dolphins and has provided more information [here](#).

This Sunday, Acres will be holding a concert at the Speakers' Corner, where animal lovers will gather to urge RWS to release the 25 dolphins.