

Dolphins were kept in 'appalling conditions'

05:55 AM Jan 12, 2011

Letter from Louis Ng Executive Director, ACRES

I refer to the article "Oh where, oh where have the dolphins gone?" and the letters "Marine park walks the talk" and "RWS must comply" (Jan 8).

The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) fails to see how Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) is waging the talk considering they paid for 27 wild-caught dolphins. Taking the 27 dolphins might be detrimental to the survival of this species in the Solomon Islands.

While the trade in bottlenose dolphins is allowed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a leading authority on the environment and sustainable development, stated that exports of dolphins from the Solomon Islands should not take place due to the uncertainty of the impact of trade on the species. IUCN also states that "CITES Parties should not issue permits to import dolphins from the Solomon Islands".

RWS also needs to walk the talk with regard to caring for the dolphins.

The "team of professionals and animal experts" failed to provide adequate care to the dolphins in Langkawi and it seems RWS did not even employ a full-time vet to care for the dolphins or have an animal hospital there. Can RWS confirm that only two dolphins have died in Langkawi or the Philippines so far, and if any have escaped?

Having personally seen the enclosures the dolphins in Langkawi were housed in for almost a year, ACRES is appalled by their living conditions. The dolphins were housed in rusty enclosures measuring approximately 10m by 10m and this is clearly insufficient to meet the needs of these wild-caught dolphins. ACRES also cannot understand why anyone would choose such an unsuitable location (with high boat traffic causing noise and environmental pollution) to house dolphins.

ACRES has now learnt that the Langkawi dolphins have been moved to the Philippines. Why weren't all the dolphins sent to the Philippines in the first place?

Scientific studies indicate that handling and transportation are stressful events for dolphins. Each time they are confined and shipped from one place to another, it is as traumatic as if they were being newly captured from the wild. The experience of being removed from water and restrained is apparently so stressful to dolphins that they never find it routine.

The dolphins have endured being removed from their homes in the Solomon Islands. They have endured the transport to the Philippines or Langkawi.

The Langkawi dolphins have watched two family members die and endured living in small rusty enclosures, endured a year of training sessions and the only thing in store for them now is the final transport to Singapore to entertain RWS guests.

Zoos can play an important role in raising awareness but it should not be at the cost of the animals.

ACRES will continue our positive dialogue with RWS but we sincerely hope that they will reconsider their decision and put themselves in the shoes of these dolphins.

URL <http://www.todayonline.com/Voices/EDC110112-0000185/Dolphins-were-kept-in-appalling-conditions>

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