

## Animal rights' group takes RWS to task over dolphins

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SINGAPORE - The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) has called on Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) to retract its calls for more dolphins to be collected.

It said RWS had already bought 27 Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins, caught from the Solomon Islands for their Marine Life Park (MLP) attraction, and two died.

ACRES on Thursday disputed an RWS statement issued last Friday by a park spokesperson that to avert species crises, more controlled dolphin collections should be done from more locations and more facilities built to study and breed them.

ACRES said that efforts should instead focus on addressing why dolphins were disappearing in the wild.

It quoted a report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, that the threats facing the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins included live capture for oceanariums, pollution, overfishing, incidental catches and environmental degradation.

When contacted by MediaCorp, MLP did not deny or confirm whether it would retract its calls for more dolphin collection, but pointed out that bottlenose dolphins were not endangered as ACRES said. And "scientific data" over the past several decades point to the fact that bottlenose dolphins can thrive in facilities, MLP added.

"Dolphins in marine parks have lived well over 40 years old, twice the average life span of dolphins in the wild. Dolphins have also been bred successfully in facilities, an important measure of successful adaption of dolphins to human care," it said.

But according to ACRES, establishing captive breeding programmes did not address or eliminate the cause of wild population declines, and subjected dolphins to the stress of capture, transport and captivity.

Catching them might drive them towards extinction, ACRES argued.

While it acknowledged that breeding programmes will "never address" the challenges marine life face in the wild, MLP said marine parks provide an important source of funding and expertise to conservation projects.

"Many have established laboratories, veterinary care and husbandry practices. They contribute heavily to current day's crop of marine mammal research and conservation projects ranging from field research, water quality studies, to reproduction and physiology, as well as rescue rehabilitation," it said.

It added that the park has been developed to exceed international standards for animal care and welfare, and is working towards international accreditation in these areas and educational and conservation programmes.

Meanwhile, ACRES' executive director Louis Ng said more than 6,000 people had joined ACRES in asking RWS to free the dolphins. **ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY ESTHER NG**

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