

## **The Straits Times**

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### **Dolphins in captivity live longer: RWS**

*By Feng Zengkun*

Dolphins in captivity can live twice as long as their counterparts in the wild, Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) said yesterday.

The resort also said that the captive dolphins provide valuable information to scientists in the field of marine mammal science.

It shared its views in a letter to The Sunday Times, following calls by activists to release its 25 dolphins, bought between 2008 and 2009. These are to be displayed in the resort's Marine Life Park, expected to open by year-end.

Last week, The Sunday Times reported on efforts to free the dolphins, including a letter to the resort from marine mammal specialist Ric O'Barry, and campaigns by local group Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres).

Two of the dolphins died last October from a bacterial infection caused by contaminated soil and surface waters while they were being housed in Langkawi, Malaysia.

The remaining dolphins are currently housed in Ocean Adventure Park in Subic Bay in the Philippines.

In yesterday's letter to The Sunday Times, RWS said its upcoming park will exceed international standards for animal welfare. It noted that dolphins in the wild 'do not enjoy a totally carefree life, but fight for their survival from predators, fishing boats and pollution'.

It said studies show the captive dolphins can live for more than 40 years, double the average lifespan of dolphins in the wild.

This was based on a report by the international Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. But checks by The Sunday Times show that this is debated by marine scientists.

RWS also said 'zoos and marine parks have inspired people to illustrious careers in animal care, conservation and veterinary science'. It added that marine parks provide valuable information for scientists to study dolphins' reproduction, physiology and nutritional needs.

It said: 'Deeply personal encounters with the animals - learning about their behaviour, care and needs - have shown great impact on fostering awareness and advancing protection of the species.'

However, Mr O'Barry said: 'Japan has a large number of dolphin parks but that hasn't stopped the country from being one of the worst killers of dolphins.'

The resort noted that there will always be differences in views regarding captive animals in zoological organisations. It said: 'The Marine Life Park shares the same goal as animal lovers, to promote the conservation of dolphins, though we have differing views on the best way to carry it forward.'

RWS also said that it has not received any correspondence from Mr O'Barry, although the latter said that it was sent. The Sunday Times obtained a copy of the letter, which was also addressed to the Singapore Tourism Board.

When contacted, Mr Louis Ng of Acres said zoos have an important role to play in educating the public about animals but dolphins in particular are not suited for captivity.

He urged RWS to fund conservation work to protect dolphins in their natural habitats instead.

'Wild dolphins do not enjoy a carefree life, but they can choose where to go, what to eat, who to socialise with, and they will not be forced to perform if they do not want to.'