

Mr Su Zhigang

Chairman

Guangdong Chimelong Group

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Guangzhou

**February 2014**

Dear Mr Su Zhigang

We are writing on behalf of the Asia for Animals coalition, representing international organisations with extensive knowledge of animal welfare issues.

We express our deep concern with regards the captureof killer whales, or orcas,from their natural habitat to ‘reportedly’ be imported into China to provide entertainment at your Ocean Kingdom in Zhuhai.

Capture methods are invasive, stressful and potentially lethal.Particularly in the case of orcas, capture not only traumatizes the individuals taken, but can cause severe social disruption in the groups left behind. Captive facilities, with their space limitations and commercial considerations, cannot provide conditions that allow orcas to express their natural behaviours to meet their physical and psychological needs.

* Family and group members are separated from each other;
* Studies are rarely conducted to ascertain what happens to those animals left behind;
* Once removed from their natural environment,whales are transported to small enclosures whichare only a fraction of the size of their natural home range, and lack their family members and social groups;
* The lifespan of captive orcas is generally halved compared to those in the wild
* Mortality rates for bottlenose dolphins (and possibly other dolphins such as orcas)increase six-fold during and immediately after capture[[1]](#footnote-2)

Whales and dolphins are wide-ranging, social animals and captivity cannot provide them with the social, visual and auditory stimuli of their natural environment. They must adapt to an artificial diet, strange noises, and the unnatural proximity of people and other captive animals. Many will suffer from the stress of confinement, which often results in aggression and other behavioural abnormalities, reduced calving success, stomach ulcers, and reduced immune response. These in turn result in poor quality of life, reduced life expectancy and higher infant mortality than what the animals would experience in the wild.

Cetacean performances do little to educate the public on issues of natural behaviours, ecology, or conservation status. There is little objective evidence to indicate that the public display industry is furthering the public’s knowledge of marine mammals and their habitats, or demonstrating a link between watching commercial marine mammal performances and an increase in conservation action directed towards the protection of animals in the wild.

Observing cetaceans perform tricks has the potential to desensitize the observer to the suffering of cetaceans in captivity and does little to encourage the development of the compassion and empathy necessary to invoke actions to protect wild cetaceans from exploitation.

The keeping of Orca’s in captivity is a huge controversy in the US and an ethically questionable practice. A 2012 US public opinion poll demonstrated that the American public is opposed to this practice, with three in four people opposed to keeping Orcas in captivity.[[2]](#footnote-3)

The welfare issues involved in capturing, transporting and confining a wild animal such as an orca to a restricted tank or pool cannot be justified on the basis of potential educational benefits to the general public. Indeed, in viewing these animals at Ocean Kingdom, the general public would learn that removing animals from their natural habitat for the entertainment of humans is acceptable, and that an animal displaying signs of stress is normal. This is not a message China’s public, particularly its children,should be learning when visiting a facility such as Ocean Kingdom.

Decades of research on cetaceans, has revealed that their brains are large, complex and capable of sophisticated thought. Cetaceans such as orcas have demonstrated culture,[[3]](#footnote-4) tool-use[[4]](#footnote-5), individuality[[5]](#footnote-6), consciousness, and self-awareness.[[6]](#footnote-7)

On behalf of all of our members globally, we appeal to you to organise the release of these whales back into their natural habitat – their time in captivity has been very short and a return to the wild has a high probability of success if done soon – and to commit to not capturing any marine mammals from the wild for display at Ocean Kingdom in the future.

**Sent on behalf of the following organisations:**

* Animal Guardians
* Animal People
* Animals Asia Foundation
* ACRES
* Blue Cross of India
* Change for Animals Foundation
* Earth Island Institute
* Humane Society International
* International Animal Rescue
* International Fund for Animal Welfare
* Philippine Animal Welfare Society
* Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (UK)
* Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Hong Kong
* World Society for the Protection of Animals

Please respond to David Neale, Animal Welfare Director, Animals Asia Foundation, 10/F, Kai Tak Commercial Building 317-319 Des Voeux Road, Central, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

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For further information please see “The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity” <http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/marine_mammals/case_against_marine_captivity.pdf>

Supported by;

1. Animal Welfare Institute
2. Cetacean Society International
3. Elsa Nature Conservancy, Japan
4. Free Willy Keiko Foundation
5. Fundación para el Asesoramiento y Acción en Defensa de los Animales, Spain
6. Grupo de los Cien, Mexico
7. SOS Dolphins
8. Marine Connection, UK
9. Orca Network
10. Whale & Dolphin Conservation

1. R. J. Small and D. P. DeMaster, “Acclimation to captivity: A quantitative estimate based on survival of bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions,” *Marine Mammal Science* 11 (1995): 510–519. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. # Poll Reveals Americans Oppose Keeping Orcas in Captivity <http://dev.wdcs.org/en/issues/poll-reveals-americans-oppose-keeping-orcas-in-captivity>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Krutzen, M., et al Cultural transmission of tool use in bottlenose dolphins, Proceedings of the National Acadamy of Social Sciences of the USA, J*une 21, 2005 vol. 102 no. 25 8939-8943* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Patterson EM, Mann J (2011) the Ecological Conditions That Favor Tool Use and Innovation in Wild Bottlenose Dolphins (Tursiops sp.). PLoS ONE 6(7): e22243. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0022243 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. M.C.Caldwell et al., ‘Review of signature whistle hypothesis for the Atlantic bottlenose dolphin,’ in *The Bottlenose Dolphin*, edited by Leatherwood and Reeves, 199-234 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Reiss, D,, andMarino, L., Mirror self-recognition in the bottlenose dolphin: A case of cognitive convergence *PNAS 2001 98 (10) 5937-5942;*  [↑](#footnote-ref-7)