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May 9, 2013

Dear President Park:

I am writing on behalf of the undersigned organizations representing millions of supporters and constituents worldwide to express our grave concern and opposition to the proposed construction of a new dolphin facility at Geoje Sea World, located on Geoje Island near Busan, South Korea¹. According to media reports, the facility is due to be completed by the end of this year, and will include 4 belugas imported from Russia, and 15 dolphins from Taiji, Japan. On welfare and conservation grounds, our organizations request that you halt the construction of this facility immediately for the reasons outlined below.

Welfare concerns

The dolphins proposed to be sent from Japan to Geoje Dolphin Park will be acquired through the dolphin drive hunts that occur annually in the coastal town of Taiji. The connection between these devastating hunts and the demand generated by the import and export of dolphins acquired through the dolphin drive hunts is well-documented². Dolphin drive hunts, also known as “drive fisheries,” occur annually from September through April where up to 2,000 dolphins are permitted to be killed.

During these hunts, dolphins and small whales are encircled by motorboats out at sea and chased into shallow coastal waters where they are trapped with nets. The dolphins are then killed or taken alive to be sold into captivity. Every aspect of this hunt is extremely cruel: from the exhausting drive from the open ocean that can separate family groups, to confinement in a netted cove where the dolphins are crudely slaughtered³. During these hunts and captures, these highly sentient mammals face severe distress, suffering and pain. Many die of stress and injury during, and immediately after, capture and transport to facilities in Japan and overseas.

If the dolphins acquired from these hunts survive the trauma of capture and transport, they are destined for an impoverished life in captivity where their lifespans are reduced.⁴ The captive environment cannot accommodate the mental, physical and social needs of dolphins. In the wild, these animals can travel up to 100 kilometers a day and have intricate social structures. In contrast, in captivity they are forced into relative idleness in an artificial and chemical-laden environment, where their behavior is controlled and subdued by humans, and where they are made to interact with other individuals or species they would normally avoid in the wild. All of this can induce stress, a weakened immune system and premature death. It can also provoke

¹ <http://geojeseaworld.com/main.php>. The facility will be called Geoje Dolphin Park.

² See WDC's Driven by Demand at http://www.wdcs.org/submissions_bin/drivenbydemand.pdf

³ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgDkcXljh4c> for a video of the killing methods utilized in these brutal hunts. A veterinary analysis of these killing methods can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10888705.2013.768925>

⁴ Small, R. and D.P. DeMaster. 1995b. Survival of five species of captive marine mammals. *Marine Mammal Science* 11:209-226; Woodley, T.H., J.L. Hannah, and D.M. Lavigne. 1997. A comparison of survival rates for captive and free-ranging bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) and beluga whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*). IMMA Technical Report No. 97-02.

aggression between captives, often leading to injuries and death. Despite the so called ‘comforts of captivity’ (provisioning of food and veterinary care, protection from predators and pollution), many captive dolphins die long before their wild counterparts.

Capture and transport are irrefutably stressful, dangerous, and deadly for dolphins. Physiological indications of stress associated with capture and captivity include elevated adrenocortical hormones⁵ and mortality rates of captured bottlenose dolphins shoot up *six-fold* immediately after capture and do not drop down to “normal” levels for up to 35-45 days⁶. Furthermore, dolphins face this elevated mortality risk every time they are transported, even after long periods in captivity; in short, they never become accustomed to transport, despite improved transport methods. In addition, capture methods are violent, and may cause distress, physical harm, and even death not only to those animals captured, but for the ones left behind. Beluga whales have died during capture and transport in Russian operations, and the numbers of dolphins killed during the drive hunts are staggering.⁷

We are also very concerned about the holding conditions of beluga whales currently held captive, or destined for future captivity, around the world. These social animals are supremely adapted to pack life in near freezing conditions. Despite the compelling scientific and moral case against their captivity, a strong market for belugas exists, increasingly met by dealers who even offer them for sale on the Internet. In recent years, our groups have documented reports of belugas performing in traveling circuses (mobile shows) in the Middle East. The welfare of these animals is highly compromised by the intense heat, the stress caused by transportation, and the extremely cramped conditions typical of a traveling show or other captive environments.

Conservation concerns

As the current worldwide captive population of dolphins remains unsustainable, the development of live dolphin displays in South Korea will likely lead to additional dolphins being captured from the wild, which often involves cruel methods and with unknown consequences for the population from which they are removed. Even if Geoje Sea World were to seek already-captive dolphins from existing facilities, these dolphins are likely to have been originally captured from the wild from unsustainable or cruel capture operations such as those operating in Japan and the Solomon Islands. Any expansion of the dolphin display industry through construction of new dolphinariums increases the demand for captures from the wild.

Between 1990 and 2010 [20 year period], the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (CITES database) records the export of at least 237 live belugas from the Russian Federation. From 2008-2010 there were 63 live belugas exported from Russia to China alone. The increasing international trade in beluga whales has spread to ‘new’ countries importing them for public display, including Turkey, Iran, Egypt and China. Russian beluga populations targeted for capture were subject to intensive hunting until the early 1960s and they are still recovering.⁸ In fact, over-hunting all but wiped out the entire sub-population of Sea of Okhotsk belugas in the 1930s.

The North American beluga breeding cooperative has been unsuccessful, showing a decline in the captive population⁹. This is despite more than five decades of effort by the North American public display industry

⁵ St. Aubin, D.J. and J.R. Geraci. 1988. Capture and handling stress suppresses circulating levels of thyroxine (T4) and Triiodothyronine (T3) in beluga whales, *Delphinapterus leucas*. *Physiological Zoology* 61:170-175; Thompson, C.A. and J.R. Geraci. 1986. Cortisol, aldosterone, and leucocytes in the stress response of bottlenose dolphins, *Tursiops truncatus*. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Science* 43:1010-1016.

⁶ Small, R. and D.P. DeMaster. 1995a. Acclimation to captivity: a quantitative estimate based on survival of bottlenose dolphins and California sea lions. *Marine Mammal Science* 11:510-519.

⁷ Nearly 900 dolphins were killed during the 2012-2013 drive hunt season in Taiji, Japan..

⁸ Shpak, O., Meschersky, I., Hobbs, R., Andrews, R., Glazov, D., Chelintsev, N., Kuznetsova, D., Solovyev, B., Nazarenko, E., Michaud, R., and Mukhametov, L. 2011. Current status of the Sakhalin-Amur beluga aggregation (the Okhotsk Sea, Russia): sustainability assessment, report for 2007-2010 stages. Report for the IUCN Independent Scientific Review Board, Chicago, 6-7 March 2011.

⁹ Willis, K. 2012. Modeling the population of belugas (*Delphinapterus leucas*) in Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquarium

to make its beluga collection self-sustaining¹⁰. Therefore, even in the best of circumstances, Geoje Sea World would be contributing to the revolving doors of death at captive facilities that perpetuates further captures and cruel hunts as new animals are ordered to replace those that die prematurely in these facilities.

Controversy and international pressure

Finally, the practice of exhibiting dolphins to the public has become increasingly controversial. Currently, a proposal to import wild-caught beluga whales from Russia to the United States is generating tremendous controversy and opposition with the American public. In many countries, including Chile, Mexico, Antigua, Costa Rica, Croatia, Switzerland, Slovenia, and Cyprus, legislation has been implemented to safeguard the future of dolphins by prohibiting capture, trade and captivity of these animals. Most recently India has announced that its intention to ban dolphin captivity.¹¹ It is clear that the demand from captive facilities such as Geoje Dolphin Park will continue to fuel this potentially unsustainable trade in dolphins from the wild, and the associated cruelty of their confinement.

WDC and the below organizations strongly oppose the drive hunts and acquisition of whales and dolphins from the wild on both welfare and conservation grounds, as well as their confinement in captivity. We encourage you to consider the impact of your country's actions on the perpetuation of inhumane or unsustainable treatment of individual whales and dolphins and their populations, including the support of the dolphin drive hunts in Japan. We hope that South Korea may join the list of countries that have demonstrated their compassion and leadership in opposing captivity and the acquisition of dolphins from the wild. To this end, we respectfully request you to implement an immediate ban on the development of any new dolphinarium in South Korea and the future capture and import of all live cetaceans for public display.

Thank you for your considerations.

Yours sincerely, and on behalf of the below organizations,



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On behalf of:

Action for Marine Mammals, Japan
Advocates for Animal Rights Nassau Bahamas
Animal Defenders International
Animal Welfare Institute
Animals Asia Foundation
BlueVoice.org

member facilities. Attachment to Permit Application File No. 17324.

¹⁰ The first beluga on display in "modern" facilities in the United States was recorded in 1958 – see http://www.ceta-base.com/library/cetabasedocs/captivebelugas_august2010.pdf.

¹¹ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/Fearing-cruelty-environment-ministry-says-no-to-dolphin-parks/Article1-1056519.aspx>

Born Free Foundation USA
Born Free Foundation
Captive Dolphin Awareness Foundation
Care for the Wild International
Cetacean Society International
Choices for Tomorrow (CFT), USA
Conservacion de Mamiferos Marinos de Mexico (COMARINO)
Dolphin Project
Earth Island Institute
Elsa Nature Conservancy, Japan
Grupo de los Cien (Group of 100), Mexico
Help Animals, Japan
Hong Kong Shark Foundation
Humane Society of Canada
Humane Society International
International Primate Protection League
Lifeforce Foundation, Canada
Marine Connection
Ocean Friends, USA
OceanCare
PEACE (Put an End to Animal Cruelty and Exploitation), Japan
Pro Wildlife
reEarth Nassau Bahamas
RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)
Society for Dolphin Conservation, Germany
Voice for Zoo Animals, Japan
WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals)
Zoocheck, Canada