



07 May 2020

H.E. Mr Mirzagaliyev Magzum Maratovich
Minister of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources

email: m.mirzagaliyev@ecogeo.gov.kz

Dear Minister:

I am writing on behalf of the Dolphinarium-Free Europe (DFE) coalition, whose members include eminent marine mammal scientists, animal welfare experts, conservationists and NGOs from around the globe. We seek to phase out and ultimately eliminate the keeping of cetaceans in captivity in Europe, whilst striving towards greater protection for those still held captive, through investigation, advocacy and education.

It has come to our attention that there are two facilities operating in Kazakhstan holding bottlenose dolphins for public display and shows, with dolphins imported from outside of Kazakhstan, including from the Russian Federation.

Dolphins do not thrive in captivity. In the wild these animals can travel 40 to 100 kilometres a day, have intricate social structures and are highly intelligent. However, in captivity they are forced into relative idleness in an artificial environment where their behaviour is controlled and subdued by humans. They are made to interact with species and individuals they would normally avoid in the wild, which can induce stress, boredom, a weakened immune system and premature death. It can also provoke aggression between them, leading to injuries and even death. Such displays of aggression may occur between dolphins and towards human visitors or trainers. The captive environment cannot accommodate the mental, physical and social needs of dolphins and also fails to demonstrate their natural behaviour, complex lives and the natural environment they inhabit. Despite the so-called comforts of captivity and the food and veterinary care provided, many captive dolphins suffer diseases related to limited diet and lack of exercise. For further details regarding the impacts captivity has on cetaceans we invite you to read [The Case Against Marine Mammals In Captivity](#).¹

Heightened public awareness about the plight of marine mammals in captivity is reducing demand for seeing dolphins and whales performing in captivity. If this trend continues, captive dolphin facilities will soon need to reconsider the future of the dolphins they hold. Countries including India, Canada and a number of European Union Member States and Latin American countries have taken steps to prohibit or phase out dolphin and whale captivity through the introduction of legislation or advice to regional authorities. Across the world countries have either introduced very strict industry requirements for captive dolphin facilities (e.g. in the United Kingdom), or have outright prohibited the keeping of cetaceans in captivity for commercial purposes (e.g. Slovenia, Cyprus and Croatia). Poland is one of 13 EU countries currently without captive dolphin facilities, and this number is likely to increase as governments recognise that this wildlife exploitation no longer has a place in their society.

In view of the above, we respectfully urge you to consider legislation that prohibits live capture of cetaceans from the wild and phases out dolphin captivity through a breeding ban and import prohibition. National authorities could also immediately advise local authorities against construction of any additional dolphinariums in Kazakhstan. These actions would address the myriad welfare and conservation impacts imposed by such practice on whales, dolphins and their populations in the wild.

DFE already advocates the relocation of cetaceans currently held in captive facilities to seaside sanctuaries where they would receive life-long care, as well as rehabilitation for return to the wild for those who are suitable candidates for release. Given these facts, ending the captive display of cetaceans is the appropriate way forward.

Reports suggest that two dolphins from one of the facilities in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan have been returned to the Russian Federation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We respectfully urge you to take this opportunity to close the vacant facility permanently and prohibit the return of these dolphins to Kazakhstan, by doing so the country would be highly praised for such admirable efforts to protect whales and dolphins.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this important matter. We remain available to respond to any questions you may have and forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Dodds', with a large, stylized flourish below it.

Margaux Dodds

Chair

Dolphinaria-Free Europe

dfe.ngo

¹Rose, N.A. and Parsons, E.C.M. (2019). [The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity, 5th edition](#) (Washington, DC: Animal Welfare Institute and World Animal Protection)