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Coalition Concerns for the Fate of Marineland’s Orcas

As the future for the two remaining orcas, Wikie and Keijo, currently held in tanks at Marineland Antibes, in the south of France, remains uncertain, the Dolphinarium-Free Europe coalition asks why the Ministry is making a hasty decision, given the deadline to move them is not until 2026.

The Dolphinarium-Free Europe coalition, representing several NGOs and individuals from a range of EU countries, approached Ms Agnès Pannier-Runacher, Ministère de la Transition Écologique, de l’Énergie, du Climat et de la Prévention des Risques in France [via letter](#) requesting that the option to retire the two remaining orcas, Wikie and Keijo, held by Marineland Antibes in the south of France, which closed its doors to the public for the final time a few weeks ago, to a seaside sanctuary be considered and adopted. However, it has recently been confirmed that the Ministry has rejected an application made to relocate the orcas to a Canadian seaside sanctuary and instead is considering sending them to Loro Parque Zoo (LPZ), Tenerife.

LPZ has a poor husbandry record with its orcas—four have died since 2021, all significantly below the average lifespan in the wild, including Ula (aged 3). The orcas there also show signs of stress, including badly worn and broken teeth from the repetitive stereotypic behaviours of grating them against the side of the tanks and biting the metal gates.

Margaux Dodds, Chair for the Dolphinarium-Free Europe coalition and Director of Marine Connection, explains, “Loro Parque’s poor track record of mortality and welfare of the orcas under their care has been well documented. The zoo is on record as being keen to breed their orcas and have indicated that Wikie and Keijo will be utilised as part of their breeding programme, where they have used artificial insemination techniques to force this outcome. With venues closing there is more importance than ever before for this to be the last generation of whales and dolphins in captivity.”

A fifth orca named Vicky (aged 10 months) died in 2013, demonstrating how LPZ does not have the ability to provide an adequate environment for their orcas to successfully care for their young, or for young orcas to thrive under human care at their facility at all. The lack of space at LPZ is also of concern, as the tanks are smaller than the ones from the closed Antibes facility. Adding two more orcas would add to the stress levels of all animals concerned. Dolphinarium-Free Europe requests that the Ministry reconsider the options for Wikie and Keijo, rather than acting with haste, especially given that the legal deadline for moving them is not until early 2026.

Veterinarian Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy at the Born Free Foundation, added: “The evidence that the health and welfare of orcas and other cetaceans is severely compromised in captive environments is clear. The shows and tricks they are forced to perform have no educational or conservation value. The French authorities have taken the progressive and welcome step to end the captive display of cetaceans. They must now seek the best possible solutions for the remaining captive animals in the country, starting with Wikie and Keijo. Sending them to Loro Parque will only perpetuate and compound their suffering.”

Our opinion is that LPZ is not a safe, healthy facility for orcas. By authorising this export, the Ministry would be doing the orcas a great disservice.

ENDS

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