



European Association for Aquatic Mammals

Devoted to marine mammal conservation since 1972.

Government decision on dolphins undermines critical education and conservation role of zoological parks

Brussels, 6 October 2020 The European Association for Aquatic Mammals (EAAM) warns against the decision announced by the French government to ban the import and reproduction of dolphins in French zoos. If it were to be implemented, this decision would have a negative impact on the welfare of the animals concerned due to the reduction of their social groups, or even the isolation of some animals, and would compromise the highly successful European dolphin management programme. The EAAM also considers that the proposal to place dolphins in sea pens is unrealistic, ill-considered and would also be detrimental to the welfare of the animals. Of the 29 dolphins that live in French zoos today, 24 were born in zoological institutions. All these animals have spent all or most of their lives in the protected environment of a zoological park. This project announced by France will therefore have an additional negative impact on the well-being of each of them.

Zoological parks are strictly regulated, government-licensed facilities that professionally house, exhibit and care for animals for public education, conservation and scientific research purposes. In France, these parks operate in accordance with standards and guidelines as well as international standards and best professional practices that go beyond the obligations imposed by French law.

The need for to educate and raise public awareness about the impact of human activity on the environment and wildlife has never been greater: we already may be in the midst of a “sixth extinction”. Numerous scientific publications have demonstrated that the actual interactions of the public with animals create positive emotional connections that encourage attitudes and behaviour in favour of the environment preservation. At a time when the oceans are increasingly threatened by anthropogenic pollution, and when the observation of cetaceans at sea is particularly rare and reserved for a minority, marine zoological parks are a place of discovery and learning about the preservation of an ecosystem that covers 70% of the surface of our planet.

Zoological parks are key places for scientific research. Most of what we know about dolphins today is the result of observations and research carried out in zoological parks. Research conducted in zoos benefits conservation studies in natural environment by providing solid reference bases and analysis of pollutants and other environment factors that endanger marine fauna and flora, by documenting the physiological and behavioural responses of dolphins, by helping scientists in hare of monitoring populations in natural environment, and finally by developing techniques and tools that can be used in the field. The scientific research undertaken at the parks also helps France to fulfil its legal obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity to establish and maintain facilities for *ex situ* conservation.

The EAAM welcomes the establishment of manmade facilities such as seapens to house sick and injured wildlife in need of rehabilitation before returning to the wild. However, despite many proposals, such facilities do not exist today, largely because of the many



European Association for Aquatic Mammals

Devoted to marine mammal
conservation since 1972.

challenges they encountered. This includes both the exposure of the zoo animals to pollution, toxins and viruses and risks to the marine environment and wildlife created by the introduction of the animals without any mean to filter the water flowing freely through the net walls of the enclosure.

In any event, inland facilities and equipment (such as those existing in French zoological parks) would be required to provide medical care for sick animals and to house evacuated dolphins in the event of extreme weather conditions which could injure them.

The EAAM urges the French Government to carefully assess the consequences of its proposed measures on the welfare of the individual animals concerned. The Government should also consider the societal cost of losing the education, conservation and research services zoological parks are able to offer because of the high public interest in dolphins.

Founded in 1972, the European Association for Aquatic Mammals is a non-profit organization devoted to the conservation and welfare of aquatic mammals, both in zoological settings and in the wild. Its members include zoological parks and aquariums in the European Union, veterinarians, biologists, zoo and marine park directors and managers, trainers and caretakers, researchers, students and other persons who devote a significant amount of time to the in situ and ex situ welfare and conservation of marine mammals through research, medical care, training, education, conservation, management and related activities. More than 45 years ago, the EAAM created the scientific journal "Aquatic Mammals", today the world's oldest international publication of peer reviewed science on husbandry, behavior, physiology, veterinary trends, conservation, population trends, and efforts of pollution, climate change, and marine noise on aquatic mammals. The EAAM holds an annual Scientific Symposium for academics, professionals and students to exchange knowledge. www.eaam.org

Media contact: Dr. Renato Lenzi, President, European Association for Aquatic Mammals

Tel: +39 338 6216832 Email: president@eaam.org