



# European Association for Aquatic Mammals

Devoted to marine mammal  
conservation since 1972.

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To whom it may concern:

The board of the European Association for Aquatic Mammals has been informed that Barcelona city council is exploring several options to solve the non-compliance of Barcelona Zoo with the EAAM Standards and Guidelines that will oblige us to discontinue its membership in 2018. As far as we know options considered are: building a new dolphin facility, transferring the animals to another zoo or transferring the animals to a marine sanctuary.

The construction of a new dolphin facility complying with the minimum dimensions established in the Standards and Guidelines would be very much welcomed from the EAAM. Barcelona zoo has demonstrated during many years being a reliable member of the association, actively performing research, conservation and educational activities; providing a good veterinary care to its animals and having high quality husbandry standards. Hence, we are sure that a new facility, in fulfilment of the dimensions and life support system established by the association would be a first class installation that will ensure the best possible conditions to house the dolphins.



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The transference of the dolphins to another facility, not being ideal, would be also considered a reasonable option by this board. Specially, if the animals are transferred to other EAAM member, where the maximum quality standards in dolphin husbandry, veterinary medicine, welfare, education, research and conservation can be guaranteed. As you well know all the members of the EAAM are inspected every four years to certify that they are in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines of the association, and the Standards are regularly reviewed to warrant that the best practice in marine mammal husbandry is maintained by all members. As you probably are aware, being Barcelona Zoo a member of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) any transfer of the animals must be approved by the EEP coordinator. This previous authorization is compulsory for all the members of EAZA, and guarantees that animal transfers are done in a way that the genetic pool of the European population is optimised.

The third option, the transference of the dolphins to a “sanctuary” is considered unrealistic by this board. Increasingly, critics of zoological parks suggest the creation of sea pens or sea cages, i.e., fenced enclosures in open oceans or seas, to hold marine mammals. Typically publicized as proposals for “sanctuaries” to paint a more appealing public image, sea pen proponents seek to provide space for rehabilitation of rescued animals and/or the relocation of zoo animals. There are no sea pens in Europe today, however, certain organizations are publicizing their ideas and proposals to build sea pens in various Member States.



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The publicized sanctuaries planned to be build in Greece, Italy or France can only be considered preliminary ideas as there are no technical projects to support the development of such facilities. Some of them, like the sanctuary in Greek island of Lipsi, are simply impracticable as they are planned in a Natura 2000 area created to protect the Mediterranean monk seal. Mantaining a group of captive dolphins in a sea pen would facilitate the release of pathogens (resistant to veterinary drugs) to the wild fauna, putting in risk the last stronghold of the most endangered European marine mammal. There is no way that this project can obtain a positive environmental declaration from the European Authorities, not to mention the risk of genetic pollution of having aloctonous (caribbean) individuals that would be able to breed with the Mediterranean bottlenose dolphins in an eventual escape or unintentional release. Apart of contravening the European environmental law, none of these organizations has presented economical viability studies to finance the construction and running expenses of the sanctuaries in the long term. This is especially concerning because it is frequent to hear about the financial problems of the terrestrial sanctuaries, much more cheap to maintain in terms of installations, animal management, veterinary needs, food, etc. Finally, as sanctuaries do not have to comply with the European Zoos Directive or with the different national zoo legislations, the welfare of these animals will not be under the surveillance of the public veterinary services, and they could be also out of the scientific, conservation and education activities. Under these conditions the authorization, or even the support of the EEP coordinator to the transfer is highly unlikely.



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We hope that our analysis of the options has been helpful and clarifying,  
please do not hesitate to contact us if you need further assistance.

Sincerely

Arlete Sogorb

Past President

Brad Andrews

President

Javier Almunia

Incoming President