

EAZA Position Statement on the proposed Swiss ban on keeping / importing dolphins



- The EAZA Marine Mammal Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) members are recognised experts on the husbandry and welfare of marine mammals that are held under human care.
- The vast majority of bottle-nosed dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) held under human care in Europe participate in the Bottle-nosed dolphin European Endangered species Programme (EEP).
- EAZA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Association for Aquatic Mammals (EAAM).
- EAAM and EAZA have established joint Minimum Standards for the keeping of dolphins under human care that all members of the Bottle-nosed dolphin EEP have to follow.

EAZA, its Marine Mammal TAG and Bottle-nosed dolphin EEP do not support the proposed Swiss ban on keeping dolphins in human care nor do they support a ban on importing bottle-nosed dolphins into Switzerland. Such a decision would be a serious setback for the Bottle-nosed dolphin EEP which aims to perpetuate the collections of bottle-nosed dolphins in zoos without having to resort to obtaining animals from the wild. It would also be deleterious for the future and welfare of the collection of bottle-nosed dolphins in Connyland. Last but not least it would make it increasingly difficult for the Swiss public to learn about and enjoy this exceptional animal species.

Under the umbrella of the EAZA Marine Mammal TAG, EAZA runs conservation, education and research focussed breeding programmes for several marine mammal species namely four species of seals, Caribbean manatee and bottle-nosed dolphins.

Bottle-nosed dolphins held under human care in zoological gardens and marine mammal parks fulfil an ambassadorial role for their wild living conspecifics. The bottle-nosed dolphin is a non endangered exotic and highly charismatic species with a fascinating biology and social behaviour. Bottle-nosed dolphins have intense relationships with humans. Their presence in zoo's and aquaria touches the hearts of millions of visitors and children (in Europe alone 140 million citizens visit EAZA zoos per year) and inspire the general audience for a respectful approach of these beautiful animals and of the marine environment in general.

Bottle-nosed dolphins adapt readily to the artificial environment offered in zoos and marine mammal parks. This species has no instinctive fear of humans. On the contrary they are a species that spontaneously forms cooperative relations with humans in the wild. This is exceptional in the animal kingdom. Life expectancy is twice as high under human care as compared to the wild. A complete repertoire of natural behaviours is maintained and abnormal or stereotypic behaviours are virtually absent under human care. No scientific data exist that justifies the opinion this species is less suitable for keeping under human care than any other (exotic) animal species.

The Bottle-nosed dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) EEP manages all dolphins held at EAZA institutions and approved non-EAZA EEP institutions and as such includes around 90% of all dolphins in (Western) Europe. While not a member of EAZA Connyland is a member of the EEP. The goal of the EEP is to manage a demographically and genetically self-sustaining population of bottle-nosed dolphins maintaining high genetic diversity and perpetuating the collection. In this manner the need to obtain animals from the wild is prevented.

Reproduction allows for the animals under human care to enrol in natural behaviours like breeding and rearing of offspring. These opportunities are important for the well being of the animals. Social animals like bottle-nosed dolphins further profit from the presence of young and adolescent animals as they enrich the social patterns in the group by their unexpected and challenging behaviours. The reproduction of bottle-nosed dolphins has become increasingly successful during the last two decades. As dolphins do reach ages of up to 50 in zoos, animals that originated from the wild are still present in the current population. However, at present, two thirds of the animals managed in the EEP were born under human care. EEP participants have to follow the Minimum Standards for Bottle-nosed dolphins as were developed by the European Association of Aquatic Mammals and that were adopted by the EAZA Marine Mammal TAG and Bottle-nosed dolphin EEP.

Discussions on animals are often justifiably emotional. Sometimes reports from animal right activists are misleading and based on poor research with flawed results.

EAZA would like to call upon all members of the Swiss parliament to carefully reconsider the facts. In particular the facts on animal welfare of bottle-nosed dolphins under human care and the positive impact zoo's have in our modern urbanized society on the attitude of humans towards nature.

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About EAZA:

- The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) represents 340 members from 41 countries, 300 of which maintain public collections of animals. More than 280 institutions of the total EAZA membership are located within the European Union.
- EAZA member institutions receive approximately 140 million visitors a year and house more than 250,000 animals, excluding fish and invertebrates.
- EAZA member institutions employ 20,000 staff members, 5,000 of which are seasonal;
- EAZA has a significant social role in educating European citizens about animals, their conservation, and overarching threat processes such as climate change, habitat loss and how consumer behaviour interacts with these global challenges;
- EAZA has adopted the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (2005) which articulates the modern role of zoos and aquariums and their commitment to conservation;
- EAZA institutions in the European Union comply with Council Directive 1999/22/EC which relates specifically to the keeping of wild animals in zoos and aquaria;
- EAZA encourages its member institutions to apply for approval under article 13 (2) of Council Directive 92/65/EEC as this legislation enhances a collection's animal health status;
- For more information about our association, please visit: www.eaza.net
- For further questions feel free to get in touch with Bottle-nosed dolphin EEP coordinator C.E. van Elk; E-mail: niels.van.elk@dolphinarium.nl Tel: +31651615630.