CONSERVATION CONCERNS

Threats to wild populations

Wild capture of cetaceans for the captive industry continues to be a threat to small, local populations (Reeves *et al.*, 2003; Fisher & Reeves, 2005). Trade data indicate that 288 live cetaceans were imported into the EU between 1979 and 2010, in spite of a prohibition under EU CITES Regulation 338/97 on imports of cetaceans for primarily commercial purposes.

Non-compliance with EC Zoos Directive 1999/22

EU Dolphinaria, required to contribute to species conservation, are not undertaking meaningful scientific research to benefit the species in the wild and low breeding success has rendered the captive dolphin population not self-sustaining.

STATUS IN THE EU

Current numbers in Europe

There are 33 captive facilities keeping an estimated total of 309 individual cetaceans in 15 EU Member States. Spain (11) and Italy (4) host the majority of facilities. Species include bottlenose dolphins (an estimated 283 individuals), orca (12 individuals), harbour porpoise (estimated 11 individuals), beluga whales (two individuals) and one Amazon River dolphin (February 2015).

EU legislation

Fourteen EU Member States regulate dolphinaria through legislation implementing the EU Zoo Directive, which requires their commitment to species conservation, scientific research, public education and species-specific welfare standards. Five Member States (Belgium, Finland, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom) have specific legislative standards for the keeping of cetaceans in captivity. The UK's high standards currently preclude maintaining dolphinaria in the country. Italy has some of the best standards, but these are rarely enforced.

Dolphinaria-free States

Thirteen Member States do not host dolphinaria. Slovenia, Cyprus and Croatia prohibit the keeping of cetaceans in captivity for commercial purposes, Hungary prohibits dolphin imports, whilst Greece has banned all animal performances.

Photo: Sam Lipman

Dolphinaria-Free Europe is a European coalition working together to end the keeping of cetaceans in captivity. We seek greater protection for captive cetaceans through investigation, advocacy, and education, and share the position that wild animals should not be exploited for human entertainment.

Dolphinaria-Free Europe is affiliated to ENDCAP.

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ENDCAP

Captive Cetacean Welfare

Dolphins, whales & porpoises

DOLPHINARIA-FREE EUROPE

Photo: Sam Lipman

WELFARE CONCERNS

Restrictive space

The largest captive facilities are just a fraction of the size of the natural home ranges of whales, dolphins and porpoises (commonly referred to as cetaceans) (Tyack, 2009). Orcas, for example, may travel as far as 150 kilometres in a day, whilst the largest orca tank in the world is 70 metres long. When denied adequate space, large, wide-ranging carnivores commonly develop problems such as abnormal repetitive behaviour (termed stereotypies) and aggression (Clubb & Mason, 2003).

Limited social environment

Captive dolphins sharing a pool are often unrelated, from different geographic regions or from different species, which can result in changes to natural group dynamics leading to dominance-related aggression, injuries, illness and even death (Waples & Gales, 2002). In the wild, a majority of cetacean species live in interrelated family groups, or pods. These highly intelligent, social species can be found in aggregations of 100 or more animals.

Environmental quality and complexity

Captive facilities cannot provide an environment that simulates the complex natural marine environment. Most pools are smooth-sided, small and virtually empty of stimuli (Couquiaud, 2005). Some dolphinaria (e.g. in Belgium, Lithuania, Bulgaria) only provide indoor facilities, without natural light and with possibly insufficient air circulation.

Noise

Loud music and the regular, repetitive noise of pumps and filters are thought to cause significant stress to captive cetaceans, who are highly dependent on their sense of hearing (Couquiaud, 2005).

Behavioural restrictions

Training and performance in shows may provide some stimulation for captive cetaceans, but these behaviours are conditioned and are usually exaggerated or altered versions of natural behaviour (WDCS *et al.*, 2011). The natural foraging patterns of these oceanic predators are lost and the ability to hunt is denied. In captivity cetacean activity is related to the presence of trainers and an audience rather than prey movements.

Use of tranquillizers

Diazepam (Valium® and generics) is used by the captive dolphin industry to control stereotypies and anxiety, recognised as common problems in dolphinaria (Knight, 2013).

Stress

Handling, restraint, confinement, transport, isolation or crowding and an artificial diet lead to stress in captive cetaceans and, ultimately, a reduction in their life expectancy (WDCS *et al.*, 2011).

Early mortality

Captive bottlenose dolphins may live as long as wild dolphins in the best facilities, but their annual mortality rates are still slightly higher (5.6% vs 3.9%, although this difference is not statistically significant) and in many facilities around the world, significantly higher, as poor quality housing and care contribute to ill health (Small & DeMaster, 1995; Woodley, 1997); orcas, on the other hand, have a significantly higher annual mortality rate in captivity than in the wild wherever they are held (6.2% vs 2.3%) (Small & DeMaster, 1995). Beluga whales appear to live about half as long in captivity as they do in the wild, based on tooth ring analysis (Stewart *et al.*, 2006).

Cetacean species and numbers of individuals held in dolphinaria in the European Union (February 2015)

Country	Bottlenose sp	Orca	Harbour Porpoise	Beluga Whale	Amazon River Dolphin	
Belgium	7					
Bulgaria	6					
Denmark			3			
Finland	4					
France	29	6				
Germany	17				1	
Greece	7					
Italy	27					
Lithuania	8					
Malta	7					
Netherlands	36		8			
Portugal	27					
Romania	2					
Spain	96	6		2		
Sweden	10					
TOTAL	**283**	**12**	**11**	**2**	**1**	**309**