

EAZA Response to the French Ordinance on Cetaceans in human care

15 May 2017



This statement presents the position of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) on the French Ordinance on the keeping of live Cetaceans in zoos as published in the official journal on 6 May 2017 (*JORF n°0107 du 6 mai 2017, texte n° 8 - Arrêté du 3 mai 2017 fixant les caractéristiques générales et les règles de fonctionnement des établissements présentant au public des spécimens vivants de cétacés*)

The EAZA Ex-situ Programme (EEP) for Bottle-nosed dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) manages all dolphins held at EAZA institutions and approved non-EAZA EEP institutions. Over 90% of all dolphins in (Western) Europe are managed as part of the EEP, including the dolphins at Marineland Antibes, Planete Sauvage and Parc Asterix. The EEP is highly successful at achieving its main aims to maintain a demographically and genetically healthy population of bottle-nosed dolphins, and promotes the highest standards of excellence in terms of general husbandry, health and animal welfare.

EAZA, its 400 members across Europe and the Middle East and its marine mammal scientific experts are extremely concerned about the French ban on the keeping and breeding of bottle-nosed dolphins, killer whales and other Cetaceans. This aspect of the Ordinance is neither in the interest of animal welfare, nor that of marine mammal conservation, and furthermore goes against the mandate of zoos as laid down in the EU Zoos' Directive. As a key stakeholder impacted by the decision, EAZA welcomes dialogue with the French government to help ensure the regulations meet their intended purpose and avoid negative consequences for individual animals and species conservation.

EAZA believes the following in relation to the ban on keeping and breeding dolphins and other Cetaceans in zoos:

1. There is no scientific basis whatsoever for banning the keeping and breeding of bottle-nosed dolphins or indeed any other species held in zoos, including marine mammal parks. Discussions on animals are often justifiably emotional. Sometimes reports from animal right activists are misleading and based on poor research with flawed results.
2. The French legislation is detrimental to EAZA's successfully managed bottle-nosed dolphin EEP population, which is demographically and genetically self-sustaining without the need to, or indeed desire for, importing animals into the EEP population from other regions or the wild. The ability to breed and exchange animals among EEP participants is crucial to keep a healthy population of animals in socially appropriate groups and with individuals showing positive animal welfare.
3. The reproduction of bottle-nosed dolphins has become increasingly successful during the last two decades. As dolphins reach ages of up to 50 in zoos, animals that originated from the wild are still present in the current population. However, at present, over two thirds of the animals managed in the EEP were born under human care.
4. Reproduction allows for the animals under human care to experience natural behaviours like breeding and rearing of offspring. These opportunities are important for the wellbeing 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.

5. Experience with, and facilities for, the *ex situ* management of bottle-nosed dolphins, killer whales and other Cetaceans are of crucial importance for the rescue of stranded animals and the conservation of species threatened with extinction, like for example vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*)
6. Displaying dolphins and other animals held by zoos has a positive effect on the attitude of humans towards nature, particularly in our modern urbanized society. The concern shown by members of the public towards cetaceans and the marine environment is testament to the success of this role.

Taking these six points into consideration the French ban on keeping and breeding dolphins, killer whales and other Cetaceans goes clearly against the mandate of zoos, including marine parks, as laid down in EU Zoos Directive (Council Directive 1999/22/EC).

In conclusion EAZA believes that the French ban on keeping and breeding bottle-nosed dolphins, killer whales and other Cetaceans should be lifted to ensure the Ordinance: caters for positive animal welfare of Cetaceans held in human care; caters for positive contributions to species conservation; and does not jeopardise the Bottle-nosed dolphin EEP, EAZA's highly successful population management programme for *Tursiops truncatus*.

Background to EAZA

EAZA is a non-profit conservation organisation, with members across Europe and the Middle East. Its mission is to facilitate cooperation within the European zoo and aquarium community towards the goals of education, research and conservation. EAZA believes that zoos and aquariums have a strong role to play in the conservation of nature and wildlife both at our Member institutions and out in the field.

EAZA strives for its community to be a significant contributor to and driving force for global conservation and towards building the capacity, skills, and resources to prevent species extinction. With 400 members in 44 countries, out of which 26 are EU Member States, EAZA is the world's largest regional zoo association and is represented in EU Member States through National Zoo Associations and individual zoos. Every year 140 million visits are made to visit EAZA institutions ensuring we reach one in four European citizens.

EAZA defines zoos and aquaria as permanent establishments open to and administered for the public where animals of wild species are kept to promote nature conservation, through the provision of education, information, recreation and facilitation of research. EAZA is Europe's key centre of excellence for scientific knowledge about exotic animal welfare and management. This leads to production of a comprehensive set of Standards and Guidelines that encourage cooperative working amongst EAZA Members to professionally manage healthy, sustainable populations of threatened species.

Scientific experts under the EAZA Marine Mammal Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) are overseeing the population management activities for marine mammals species held by EAZA collections as well as developing best practice guidelines for the keeping of these species in human care.

EAZA media contact:

David Williams-Mitchell – Email david.williams-mitchell@eaza.net or Tel: +31 20 5200750

Bottle-nosed dolphin EEP coordinator

Niels van Elk – Email niels.van.elk@dolphinarium.nl or Tel. +31 651 615 630