



Vraag & Antwoord over Dolfijnen | Question & Answer on Dolphins

Koen Margodt, Ph.D | 20 March 2024

I. QUESTIONS WELFARE DOLPHINS

II. QUESTIONS FUTURE DOLPHINS

DOLPHIN WELFARE: GENERAL

1. **Core consideration:** complex mammals with large home ranges are prone to (i) stereotypical behaviour and (ii) high infant mortality in captivity, such as orcas, dolphins and polar bears (R. Clubb & G.J. Mason, *Nature*, 2003)
2. **Crucial information** on failed captive breeding at Boudewijn Seapark has **never been shared** with Minister Weyts and the Flemish Commission > **full reconsideration of future dolphins needed**
3. All cetacean scientists consulted by me recommend **sanctuaries above dolphinariums** due to many welfare problems in dolphinariums, more autonomy / freedom of choice in larger, more varied and natural settings
4. Focus should be on keeping animals that at least **flourish in captivity** from an animal welfare perspective: **smaller species** and **complex environments** (cf UFAW – Universities Federation for Animal Welfare)

DOLPHIN WELFARE: BREEDING

1. **High infant mortality** is an indicator of poor welfare (Boudewijn Seapark 88%, nature 30%)
2. **Breeding is not necessary to guarantee good welfare**, as demonstrated by research in sanctuaries with great apes (Ross & Hopper, 2021)
3. **Dolphinariums are full** and Boudewijn Seapark doesn't breed since 2015
4. **Realism needed:** space limited, dolphin keeping expensive, breeding expensive
5. **Remember:** bottlenose dolphins are **not Endangered**, no need captive breeding programme

"This was, of course, the objective of the European Program for Endangered Species (EEP) which, according to the experts and the European Aquatic Mammal Association's (EAAM) opinion, **they considered that the best thing for the dolphins at Rancho Texas Lanzarote Park was to form a "bachelor group"** the same as what sea lions, seals, deer, horses or elephants and also wild dolphins do in nature."

DOLPHIN WELFARE



Dr. Ingrid N. Visser

Orca Research Trust, New Zealand

”I witnessed the dolphins exhibiting **stereotypical behaviour** when I was there - logging in the corners by the smaller tanks when the show wasn't going on, head bobbing, and pattern swimming. (...) It has become so 'normalised' - like the **levels of aggression** - which I also saw when i was there. The dolphins were fighting a fair bit. (...) I distinctly recall that indoor stadium area **smelt badly of chlorine** - an indication that the water was over-treated - which is painful for the eyes of the dolphins (...) and also bad for them in general. (...) I also recall **how loud it was inside** the facility. These places often claim that the sounds in 'air' don't impact the dolphins - but they seem to forget that the dolphins can (and do) hear these sounds - despite what the facilities will try to tell you. It is evident in the fact that the trainers use a whistle - blown in the air no less - which the dolphins hear despite all the background noise!”

About the **Clegg report** for the Minister:

“In summary – there are **holes big enough for a dolphin to dive through!**”

Message from Dr. Ingrid N. Visser about 2017 visit to Boudewijn Seapark on 14 March 2024 and about the Clegg report on 17 March 2024

DOLPHIN WELFARE

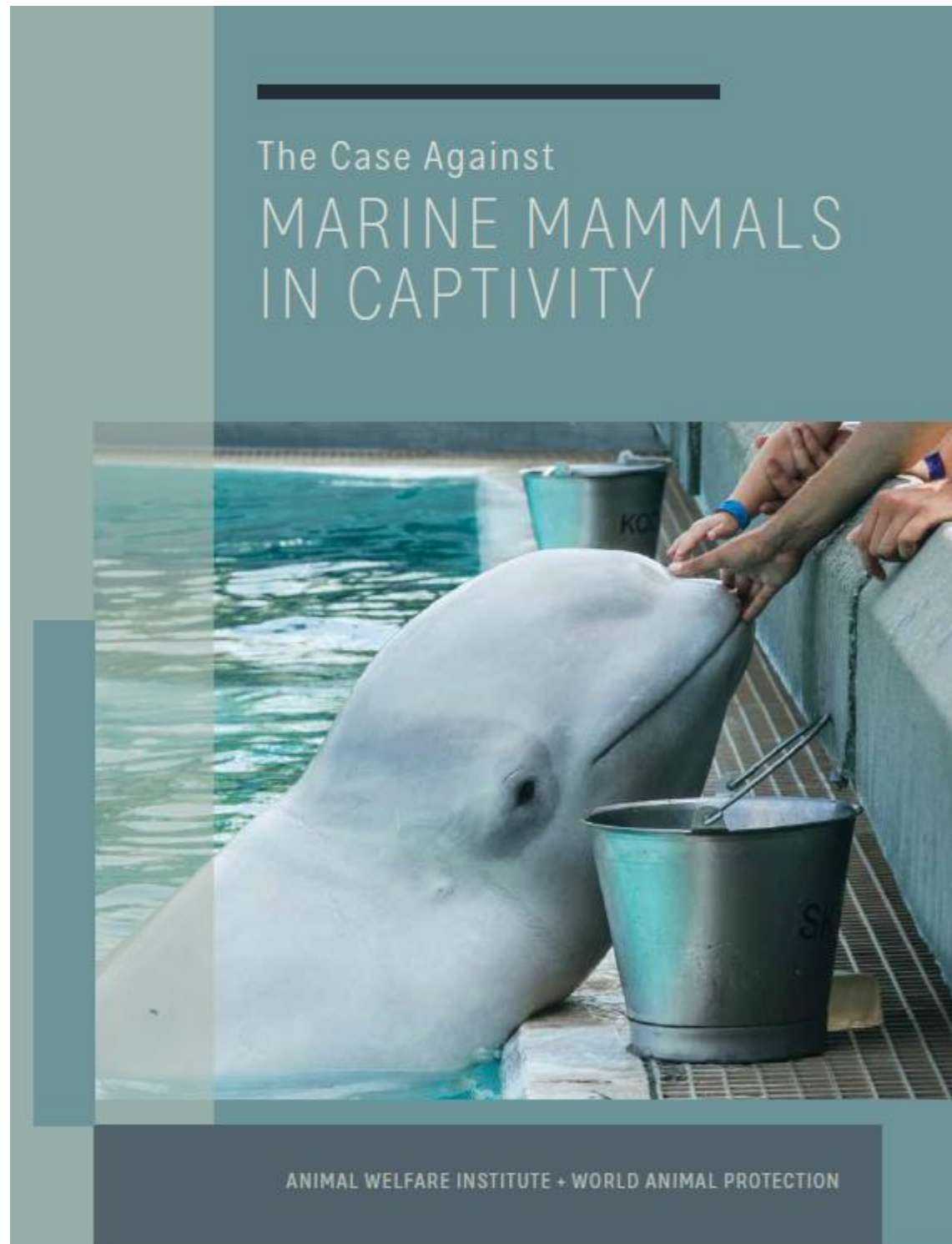


Dr. Søren Decraene
Veterinarian

”No matter how much enrichment, dolphins constantly look for new experiences, which they cannot find in a dolphinarium.”

Message from Dr. Søren Decraene, former veterinarian at Kolmarden Zoo and Dolphinarium, Sweden on 15 March 2024

DOLPHIN WELFARE



1. The **most important ethical and scientific report** on cetacean captivity not mentioned in studies for Minister Weyts
2. Contains important information about **risks of disease transmission and injuries** during dolphin and visitor contact

Source: Rose, Soller & Parsons, sixth edition, 1995/2023, 186 pp,
<https://awionline.org/content/case-against-marine-mammals-captivity>

I. QUESTIONS WELFARE DOLPHINS

II. QUESTIONS FUTURE DOLPHINS

THE FUTURE: OUTDOOR POOL VERY EXPENSIVE

generator voorzien. indien tweede pomp noodzakelijk blijkt na de studie wordt een surplus van 600 euro gerekend en extra huur per dag van 6euro

Bemalingsstudie, niet voorzien: eventuele extra voorwaarden gesteld van de overheid bij de vergunning zijn niet voorzien

Documenten voor de omgevingsvergunning

Plaatfunderingen - gewapend stortklaar beton 45cm - dubbel gewapend, wapening afzonderlijk in post gerekend - C25/30 EE2 S3 D20

Funderingswanden - beton/ ter plaatse gestort - dikte 45cm

Waterdichting ondergrondse wanden - zwelband

Waterdichting ondergrondse wanden - kimplaat

Zuiverheidslagen - stortklaar beton dikte 7cm

Wapening/staven en netten - funderingsbalken

Wapening/ staven en netten - netten funderingsplaat

1	1.825,00 €	1.825,00 €
1	210,00 €	210,00 €
1	54.105,73 €	54.105,73 €
1	53.613,90 €	53.613,90 €
1	1.471,08 €	1.471,08 €
1	1.149,08 €	1.149,08 €
1	9.255,48 €	9.255,48 €
1	77.624,00 €	77.624,00 €
1	122.070,00 €	122.070,00 €

Bedrag totaal excl. BTW 548.575,17 €

- Cost outdoor pool 500 m² and 4 m deep?
- Professional estimate firm operational in Bruges, requested by me: **Eur 548.575**
- Not included: filters and study of stability may seriously impact the price assessment
- Construction works generate **negative welfare** – up to **300-fold increase salivary cortisol** (Monreal-Pawlowsky et al., 2017)
- Research shows **better welfare only shown with open ocean pens** (live fish, lower stress levels dolphins)
- Suggestion: invest in retirement in sanctuary

THE FUTURE: WHAT BEYOND BRUGES?

RG: *Nobody in the EEP is asking for more dolphins – everyone is at their limit. We are at the point of saturation: facilities have closed, and the population is carrying on breeding, so we are absolutely full.*

RG: *It will be almost impossible for the two [Boudewijn Seapark] males to find a home in Europe. ASPRO does not have space for those dolphins in their parks. Mexico and Australia have legislation banning the import and export of dolphins, and the US and Caribbean facilities would never take our dolphins because they want to prioritise their own breeding population.*

RG: *The older females- Puck, Roxanne, and Linda- who are pretty old, will not be / easy at all to find a home for, and in welfare terms, I would question whether this is an ethical decision to move them. We may be able to place the younger females within the EEP.*

RG: *You can move older animals (above 40) if you know how to do it, and they have their social group to move with them. I would be very uncomfortable moving an older animal on its own to another park.*

RG: *We already have partners in China. I think there are some preconceptions about dolphins and China. They have a lot of resources but a lack of know-how, and even in China, they understand that things have to be different from the past. By involving Chinese facilities in the EEP we can alleviate the space pressure, and I also see it as a way to fight wild capture of dolphins in Asia.*

- Wait until older dolphins pass away?
- EEP/EAZA may be interested in younger dolphins
- Risk of being sent to China
- Risk of ‘humane killing’ (EAZA population management policy)
- Risk of pressure to keep dolphins within dolphinarium network and not to send them to sanctuary

THE FUTURE: WHAT ABOUT AMLS, LIPSI, GREECE?

1. Consulted various scientists, who see this as **realistic and best scenario** (eg Dr Schmidt-Burbach)
2. Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary (AMLS) operated by **reputable Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation** (NGO since 1998; <https://archipelago.gr/>)
3. Acquired **indefinite right to use the land at the pristine cove of Lipsi for sanctuary**
4. **Infrastructure ready**: main building (veterinary treatment facility, laboratories, offices) and roads ready
5. Profound restoration bay through **seagrass bed replanting**
6. **Strong network** of locals, conservationists, cetacean welfare scientists
7. **Financial support** NGO, Corporate and Academic partners
8. **Attention: in communication with various dolphinariums** across Europe to accept dolphins
9. **Last permits under review** for fencing off cove and final staff composition
10. Cove is **300 m long**, widest point (fence) **120 m**, **15 m deep**
11. **Expects ability to accept dolphins in 2024-2025**



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Immediate legal ban on breeding and importing cetaceans**
2. **Immediate legal ban on any direct contact public** with cetaceans
3. **No more cetacean shows** (focus paying audience, music spectacle), but interaction by caregivers with cetaceans on their own terms
4. **Relocation to seaside sanctuary – don't miss the Lipsi boat!**
5. **'Owner' to take full financial responsibility** for retiring last cetaceans to seaside sanctuary

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Thank you for your expertise: Dr. S. Decraene, D. Devisch, Prof. Dr. A. Natoli, Prof. Dr. D. L. Herzing, M. Horrill, S. Kuijpers, M. Margodt, Dr. L. Marino, Dr. J. Schmidt-Burbach, C. Vinick and Dr. I. N. Visser.

Credit images: Jo-Anne McArthur / Born Free Foundation / We Animals Media (sl 1 left), P. Fuller (sl 1 right), I.N. Visser (sl 5), S. Decraene (sl 6), Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary (AMLS) (sl 12).

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