



Koen Margodt

Ph.D. in Moral Philosophy

www.koenmargodt.com

Testimony dolphins | Commission Animal Welfare | Flemish Parliament

Dr Jane Goodall and Dr Koen Margodt

On Wednesday 6 March Dr. Jane Goodall and Dr Koen Margodt brought a testimony on the keeping of dolphins to the Commission of Animal Welfare of the Flemish Parliament. The Commission had invited them to deliver their views on a [proposal for decree on the welfare of dolphins](#) (Parl. St. VI.Parl. 1829 (2023-2024), nr. 1).

There were seven speakers: Dr. Nadine Buys, Dr. Isabella Clegg (who prepared a study for Minister Weyts about the Boudewijn Seapark), Lars van den Ham (director Boudewijn Seapark), Michel Vandenbosch (GAIA), Martin Boye (European Association for Aquatic Mammals, EAAM), Dr Jane Goodall (recorded video testimony) and Dr Koen Margodt.

The Commission was chaired by Mrs Mercedes Van Volcem.

Below you can find the transcription and translation into English. The original broadcast is [here](#) available.

Dr. Koen Margodt:

“Dear Mrs President, dear Members of Parliament, dear public, thank you for inviting me to talk to you from an ethical perspective. I wish we never should have held this debate, that nobody of us should invest our time into this, that you shouldn’t listen to us for two hours. But in the 1960s things went different and Boudewijn Seapark opened and now we need to take our responsibility, now you need to take your responsibility as representatives of the Flemish people and we also need to give attention to animal welfare. Thus, I’m pleased that I may address you, even though I don’t like these kind of debates.

Dr. Jane Goodall, with whom I closely collaborate, could not be present here and apologizes. She is currently travelling through South-Africa and couldn’t connect over Zoom to bring her testimony. But she has recorded a video of around five minutes, which I’ll show you. I don’t believe I need to introduce her – she was one of the first to study chimpanzees in the wild back in 1960 and currently at the age of ninety is still very active around conservation and animal welfare.

Let me also make clear that Dr. Goodall is not against zoos. People who have attended her last lecture in Brussels, a year ago, will be able to confirm so. Why at age ninety does she find it so important as a zoologist – as a legendary zoologist – to stop worldwide the keeping of cetaceans in captivity: bottlenose dolphins, belugas, orcas? I’ll let her address you and will then explain further our point of view.”

Testimony Dr. Jane Goodall:

[Koen Margodt shows video by Dr. Jane Goodall, which you can see [here](#).]



"Hello, this is Jane Goodall. About a year ago, I addressed Minister Weyts about the dolphins in Bruges. And now I would like to repeat my plea to you, Members of the Animal Welfare Committee of the Flemish Parliament. Dolphins are magnificent mammals of the oceans. They're incredibly smart, live in complex social communities, have personalities, minds and rich emotional lives. They develop strong social bonds, use tools, collaborate during hunting and they are playful acrobats.

Decades ago, people started capturing dolphins in the wild for captive display. Bonds between mothers and their calves and other members of their pods were broken. Dolphins were brought to concrete tanks where they were made to perform tricks. Over the years we have seen time and again tragedies occurring in these captive individuals. We know that many died way too early, calves died too soon after birth, aggression within the group and towards trainers occurred through tail-slaps and jaw-clapping. Dolphins may become depressed and listless. Some dolphins even crashed themselves into windows or banged their heads against concrete borders or wore down their teeth biting in order to try to get some freedom. A captive tank such as the one in Bruges can never meet the behavioral needs of these wonderful mammals. The environment is much too restricted, much too small, much too monotonous.

Your country had the courage to adopt important welfare laws and forbid the keeping of wild animals in circuses. Well, forcing a dolphin to perform tricks for a dead fish is no different from forcing a land mammal to perform tricks in a circus. I'm fortunate to have seen attitudes towards animals change throughout my life. The chimpanzees of Gombe, which I started studying in 1960, helped change our views on animals, helped us to understand that animals are not mere things, but beings with personalities, minds, emotions. Nowadays we know so much more about so many animal species, including dolphins, than we did sixty years ago when I began my chimpanzee study. And so it has become clear that we should terminate the keeping of dolphins in tanks. In fact, we should have done so many years ago.

I've brought together a Committee of dolphin experts co-chaired by the Belgian ethicist Dr Koen Margodt. We believe that we should phase out captive tanks and bring dolphins, orcas, belugas and other cetaceans to marine sanctuaries. Places where these magnificent mammals can live in semi-captivity. Places that allow more natural, rich and varied lives in more spacious environments. They should not be kept in captivity for our profit and entertainment.


The Jane Goodall Institute is running successfully sanctuaries for other tremendously complex mammals, namely chimpanzees who have been rescued from entertainment and other inappropriate captive situations. It has been absolutely wonderful to watch them gradually gaining confidence, forming friendships and enjoying their new freedom.

The same future should be given to dolphins. Efforts to create marine sanctuaries are under way in many countries and I beg you to do right thing, the ethical thing and agree that Puck, Roxanne, Linda, Yotta, Indy, Ocean and Beachie should have a better future. We need to do what is in the very best interests of these individuals. We owe them nothing less. Thank you."

Continuation testimony Dr Koen Margodt:

FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND MORAL SCIENCES



ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE KEEPING OF DOLPHINS

Koen Margodt, Ph.D | 6 March 2024

GHENT UNIVERSITY

“I will now bring some ethical reflections on the keeping of dolphins in captivity.”

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. WELFARE DOLPHINS
- III. ROLE DOLPHINARIUMS
- IV. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT
- V. SEASIDE SANCTUARIES
- VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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“These are the topics that I will address.”

KOEN MARGODT, PH.D



- **Guest Professor Ethics** at Ghent University and other Universities
- Co-Chair of the **Global Ethics Committee of the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI)**
- Co-Chair of the **Cetacean Committee of the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI)**
- Author *The Welfare Ark* (2000), which led to Antwerp Zoo closing its dolphinarium



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“Let me start with a brief introduction. I suppose that I do not need to introduce Dr. Jane Goodall. A few words about myself. I studied at the University of Ghent. Since many years I’m a Guest Professor in animal ethics at the University of Ghent, the University of Brussels (VUB) and elsewhere.

I collaborate since thirty years with Dr. Jane Goodall, mainly behind the scenes. We closely work together, I’m an ethical adviser to her and for the thirty chapters of the Jane Goodall Institute worldwide, including the Belgian chapter. Two years ago Dr Goodall asked me to launch a Cetacean Committee, because she sees it as an important objective to stop the keeping of dolphins and bring them to seaside sanctuaries in semi-freedom.

I am also the author of a book on zoos, *The Welfare Ark*, which resulted 25 years ago in the Zoo of Antwerp announcing the closure of their dolphinarium, two weeks after I sent them my book manuscript.”

KEY ADVISERS JGI CETACEAN COMMITTEE



Prof. Dr. Denise L. Herzing
Florida Atlantic University
The Wild Dolphin Project
USA



Melody Horrill
The Jane Goodall Institute
Kangaroo Island / Victor Harbor Dolphin Watch
Australia



Dr. Lori Marino
The Whale Sanctuary Project
USA



Prof. Dr. Ada Natoli
Zayed University
UAE Dolphin Project
United Arab Emirates



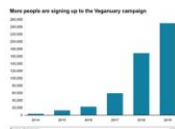
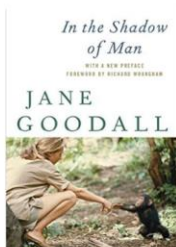
Charles Vinick
The Whale Sanctuary
Project
USA



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“Dr Jane Goodall and I are not dolphin experts, but we let us advise – also for this testimony – by experts who study cetaceans in the wild since decennia. What I will bring here, is supported by these experts. They have advised Dr. Jane Goodall and I.”

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE



Animals as
sentient
beings

Growing
Sensitivity
Animal
Welfare

Polarised
Debate
Dolphinariums

EU / Flanders
Leading Role
Animal
Welfare
Legislation



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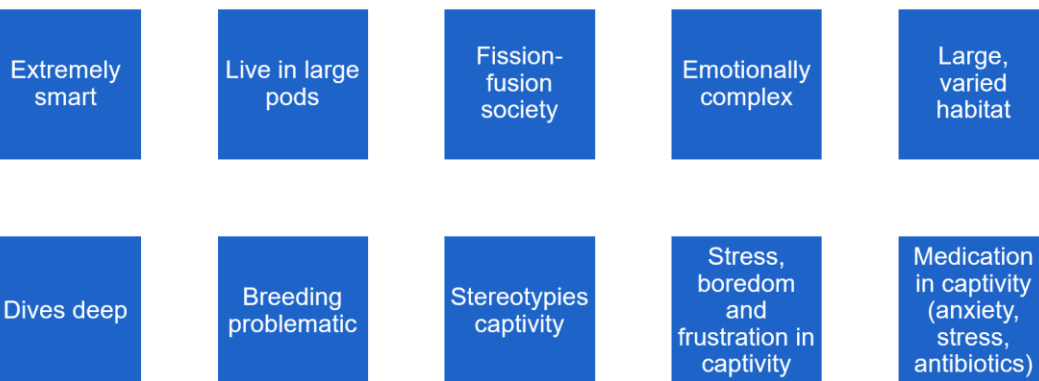
“Let us look at the overall context. We notice a considerable growing sensitivity for animal welfare over the last years, which you will be able to confirm as Members of Parliament. When you ask Dr. Goodall what achievement she is the most proud of, she answers the recognition in society of animals as sentient beings. That her study of chimpanzees has contributed to this – to see animals as individuals with personalities, emotions, that they are sentient beings. The sensitivity for animal welfare grows considerably within society and unfortunately we notice that the debate on dolphinariums is a very polarized one, this is a difficult debate. The European Union and Flanders take the lead regarding animal welfare. Examples are the

prohibition on slaughtering without anesthesia, the prohibition on the keeping of wild animals in circuses and many other topics. This is due to the Flemish people, I believe, to animal advocacy groups like GAIA, who work for over thirty years around this topic, and to your efforts as Members of Parliament. I believe this is the context for this debate.”

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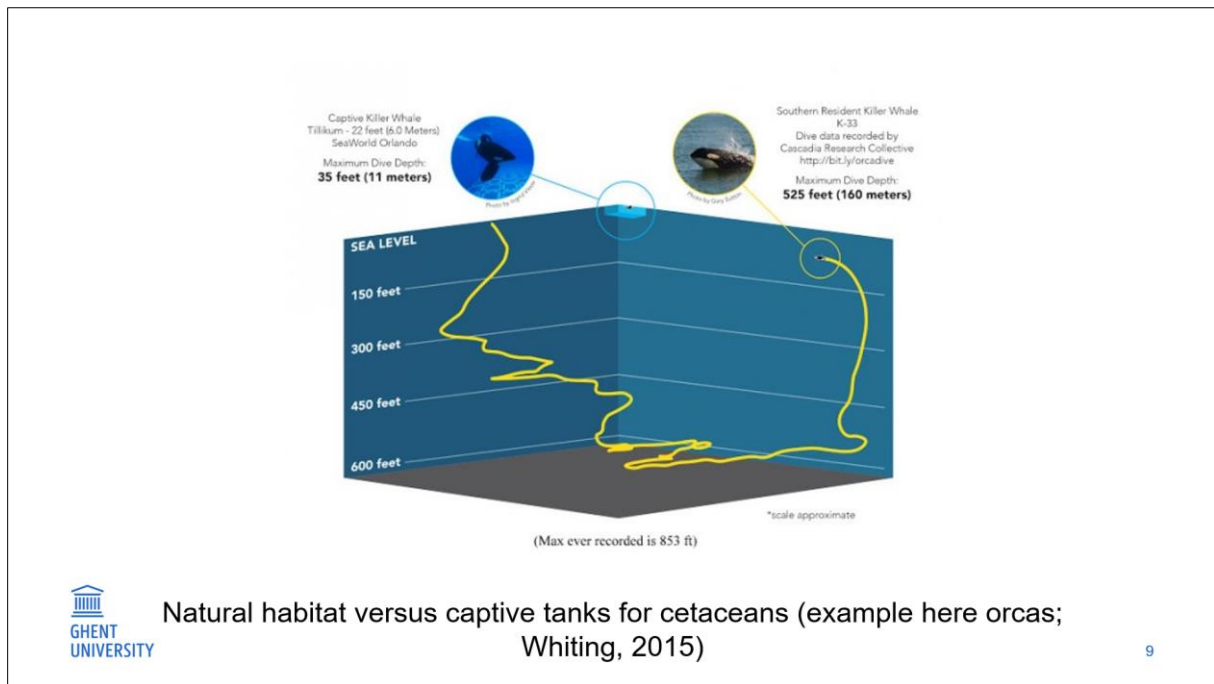
“Let’s look at the welfare of dolphins.”

THE COMPLEXITY OF KEEPING DOLPHINS



“Why are dolphins such difficult mammals to keep in captivity? Why do the experts who we have consulted see them as so extremely difficult to keep? This is due to their intelligence, the strong social bonds between tens or hundreds of individuals who live together in the wild. This is a ‘fission-fusion society’, they split in smaller groups, come back together in larger groups. They know one another as individuals. They live in a large and varied habitat, dive deep.

Breeding in captivity is problematic. Stereotypical behaviour occurs also in the dolphins in Bruges and is an important indicator of negative welfare and it is beyond my comprehension how these dolphins could receive a welfare score of +80% [in the Isabella Clegg study for Minister Weyts]. Alone already the idea that we can express in a precise percentage the well-being of an animal or human being. Stereotypical behaviour is linked to stress, boredom and frustration in captivity. The scientists whom I've consulted expressed their concern about administering medication to dolphins in captivity – anti-anxiety medication, medication against depression. I do not know where this occurs, whether this is everywhere in captivity, but they have expressed their concern about this.”



“Let’s take a look at nature. A pool where dolphins or other sea mammals are kept is incomparable to the situation in the wild. This drawing shows a pool for orcas and you can see their behaviour in nature. Well, the situation is similar for dolphins, for bottlenose dolphins.”



Coastal bottlenose dolphin population home ranges can span hundreds of kilometres

“Those who defend dolphinariums sometimes say that coastal bottlenose dolphins don’t dive deep. The advice that I’ve been given is that even the home range of bottlenose dolphins stretches over hundreds of kilometres.”



Complex fission-fusion society with cultural transmission and complex communication

“Their society is extremely complex, is based upon strong social bonds, ‘fission-fusion’ – they split in smaller groups, come back together. Like chimpanzees, they transfer cultural, learned behaviour across generations, they have very complex communication amongst one another. There may be a lot we do not know about dolphins.”



Even coastal bottlenose dolphins dive to hundreds of metres deep

“Also coastal bottlenose dolphins, I have been told, dive hundreds of metres deep. Their natural environment is much more than a swimming pool. This is a varied society, a varied habitat, consisting of currents, other lifeforms, fish – living fish with whom they feed themselves – other living animals, plants growing on the seabed. This is a highly varied habitat, which in no way can be compared to a swimming pool.”

BOUDEWIJN SEAPARK DOLPHINS

Puck
(captured
1966-...)

Linda
(captured
1980-...)

Roxanne
(captured,
1988-...)

Yotta
(Boudewijn
Seapark,
1998-...)

Indy
(Boudewijn
Seapark
2003-...)

Kite
(Harderwijk,
2005)

Moana
(Boudewijn
Seapark,
2015-...)



Seven still alive. But, what about breeding success?

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“These are the seven dolphins who are still alive at Boudewijn Seapark. One of them has indeed reached old age and was born during the 1960s. Three of them have unfortunately been captured in the wild, around Florida or somewhere in middle America. One of them is born in the dolphinarium of Harderwijk in the Netherlands. The three others have been born in Boudewijn Seapark. They say that breeding is so important. Well, how did breeding go in Bruges? You won’t find it on their website, nothing is mentioned there.

But, what about the other dolphins that have been born there? Also the study for Minister Weyts, which has been mentioned here, refers to the importance of dolphin breeding in captivity. Well, let's take a look for Bruges, how many dolphins were born there and how many are still alive. Well, we actually know already that three are still alive."

A DISASTROUS BREEDING EXPERIMENT

Oshin (1987-1988)	Kim's calf (1989†)	Terry's calf (1989†)	Fernanda (1990-1992)	Skippy (1990-2000)	Thea (1991†)
Stefanie (1993†)	Astrid (1994†)	Yasmine (1994†)	Simo (1995†)	Guarna (1995†)	Linda's Calf (1996†)
Nemo (1996†)	Linda's calf (1997†)	Yotta (1998-...)	Flo (1998-2012)	Milo (1999-2008)	Iggy (2002†)
Indy (2003-...)	Yotta's calf (2010†)	Roxanne Twin 1 (2011†)	Roxanne Twin 2 (2011†)	Bruce (2012†)	Origi (2014†)
	Moana (2015-...)	Ori (2015-2023)			

† = died same year when born; red = died; yellow = still alive
 Source: <https://www.cetabase.org/inventory/boudewijn-seapark/>

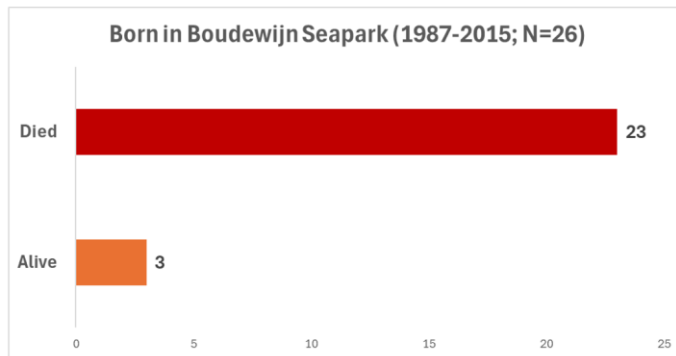


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"These are the dolphins who have been born in the dolphinarium of Bruges. It is a disastrous, completely failed breeding experiment. Nothing less than this. And therefore I understand so little is mentioned about it. I suppose this is the first time you hear about this? [Several MPs are nodding to confirm.] Has the breeding improved over the years? No. The crosses indicate where a dolphin died in the same year as their birthyear. Have a look at the last years. 2010: died. 2011: died. 2011: died. 2012: died. 2014: died during the same year. Moana is still alive. Ori has unfortunately passed away at age eight. This is an utterly failed breeding experiment.

My information is incomplete. Other dolphins have been born and died in Bruges, but I wasn't able to find all information. Also, here you only see dolphins who have been born in Bruges. The dolphins who have been brought there, who were captured in the wild and were transferred to Bruges and died there aren't shown. You also don't see the tremendous traumatic impact of capturing dolphins in the wild, the other dolphins from their pod, from their society, who died during capture – also those aren't mentioned here."

A DISASTROUS BREEDING EXPERIMENT



- 88% (23/26) died
- 87% (20/23) died between 0-2 years
- Ori died last at 8 y in 2023
- No more births since 2015
- Not in study for Minister Weyts
- Death Ori only in media because of animal advocacy group
- Importance breeding for welfare not demonstrated
- In the wild 30% may die in first four years, but 70% survive in adulthood (Wells, 2021)

“Here’s a summary overview. I know that of 26 who have been born, 23 or 88% died. 87% died between the age of 0 and 2 years. Ori was the last one, passing away last year at the young age of eight. Fortunately, there haven’t been any births anymore since 2015. [KM: apparently anticonception is now applied.] This information isn’t included in the study for Minister Weyts. The death of Ori only reached the media because of the efforts of an animal advocacy group.

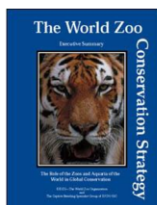
Don’t be misled. Nowhere it has been scientifically demonstrated that dolphins or other mammals need to breed in captivity for their welfare. I have consulted studies on this topic and so have the experts who advise us. The importance of breeding for elevated animal welfare has not been demonstrated. Otherwise the many sanctuaries with great apes and other animals would be in a seriously problematic situation.

I also wanted to know the figures for the wild. Well, in nature the mortality is much lower than in Bruges. In the first four years a conservative estimate states a possible mortality of 30%, I was told by a dolphin researcher from Florida. She told me that 70% of dolphins survive into adulthood. It isn’t easy to know how many dolphins are born in nature, but some populations are investigated so carefully over the years that this is reliable information. A mortality of 87% in Bruges, a mortality of on average 30% - in line with that of other mammals – in the wild. These are figures that render me silent.

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“What about the role of dolphinariums, which like to count themselves as part of the zoo community?”

STRATEGY ZOOS



EDUCATION

RESEARCH

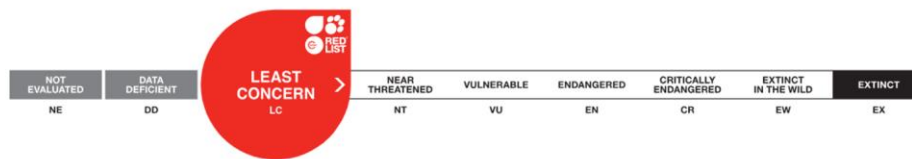
FUNDRAISING

ENTERTAIN

CONSERVATION: BREEDING AND REINTRODUCTION OF
ENDANGERED SPECIES

“Well, I’ve done extensive research on zoos as an ethicist. The strategy of zoos, the foundation of it – as you probably know – is breeding of endangered species, with the hope to maintain a genetically varied population in captivity and hopefully to reintroduce these in nature, as occurred successfully for for example the Arabian oryx, the black-footed ferret and the Californian condor. That’s the foundation – conservation, reintroduction. The other pillars rest on this foundation: education, scientific research, fundraising for *in situ* projects in the wild and entertainment is fine if the rest is taken care of. This is the strategy of zoos. What about dolphinariums and in particular the keeping of bottlenose dolphins, the species in Bruges?”

CONSERVATION OF BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS?



“The Common Bottlenose Dolphin is **among the most common cetacean species globally**. (...) The sum of available abundance estimates is around **750,000**, however the vast majority of the species’ range has not been surveyed therefore actual abundance is **considerably higher**.”



Source: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22563/156932432>

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“Well, the IUCN redlist indicates that bottlenose dolphins are not a Critically Endangered species. They are also not Endangered. They are not Vulnerable. They are not Nearly Threatened, they are classified as Least Concern. There are at least still 750.000 bottlenose dolphins, looking from a species perspective, in nature and probably many more. There is no need at all for a project in captivity to breed bottlenose dolphins from a conservation perspective.

Some individual dolphins have a serious impact from pollution in some places, or get tangled in fishing nets, or specific populations are locally threatened and these are serious problems. But there is absolute no need for a breeding programme in captivity and the idea of an EEP, an European Endangered Species programme, a breeding programme of EAZA, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, which also exists for bottlenose dolphins, is a *contradictio in terminis*. The only place where bottlenose dolphins are endangered is in captivity.

And this is why there is a captive breeding programme, because their numbers are relatively low, the genetic variation is low, and if I were responsible for this breeding programme I would plea to capture new dolphins in the wild in order to bring in new ‘founders’ and more genetic variation. The only place where bottlenose dolphins are endangered is in captivity. And this is why there exists an EEP, for no other reason, don’t let yourselves be told differently. These are scientific facts.”

EDUCATION IN DOLPHINARIUMS?



- Usually part of an **entertainment park**
- **Circuslike shows** for dead fish
- Dolphins are already **extremely popular** – like dinosaurs, popularity not due to captive display
- **No open information** – history capture, failed breeding
- **Distorted view nature** for self-justification

“What about education? You see the picture of Boudewijn Seapark. It speaks for itself, this is a sedentary circus. This is a fair. This is an amusement park. I’m sorry, I can’t call this a zoo, these are circuslike shows and dolphins are very popular, but dolphinariums are surfing on the popularity of dolphins. Dinos are extremely popular too with children, including mine. They have never seen a single dino in captivity. Dolphins are very popular notwithstanding the existence of dolphinariums, as I will show you in a moment.

From an educational perspective, the information that reaches the general public and you as Members of Parliament is very selective. Why? Because they do not want to talk about how special nature is. No, they talk about how fantastic their dolphinarium is and how many liters of water there is in their swimming pool. They do not talk about the history of capturing dolphins, the traumatic impact on those three dolphins and on those remaining in nature, how many dead dolphins this has cost. They never talk about their failing breeding experiment. No, if I want to prepare a lecture as a child and I go to the website of Boudewijn Seapark, I download the PDF, then I learn that dolphins live longer in captivity than in the wild and that there are problems with breeding in the wild.

I like to believe that the staff who work with the dolphins in Bruges are very dedicated to the dolphins. But the information that is shared with us is very selective and I have some emotional problems with this. [KM: referring here to the emotionality of the director when he spoke.] A distorted image of nature for reasons of self-justification. From an educational perspective, we do not need dolphinariums.

I won’t talk about scientific research. Take a look at ResearchGate and other academic sites – you will find very little about the dolphinarium in Bruges. And I understand this and you need to evaluate whether what you find is really important, or whether these studies mainly have a value in supporting dolphinariums themselves.”

DIRECT CONTACT IN DOLPHINARIUMS?



- Risk of **serious injuries** for humans
- Risk **disease transmission in both directions** - from humans to dolphins and from dolphins to humans
- **Stressful for dolphins**, personal space invaded by unfamiliar people, visitors do not understand dolphin signals

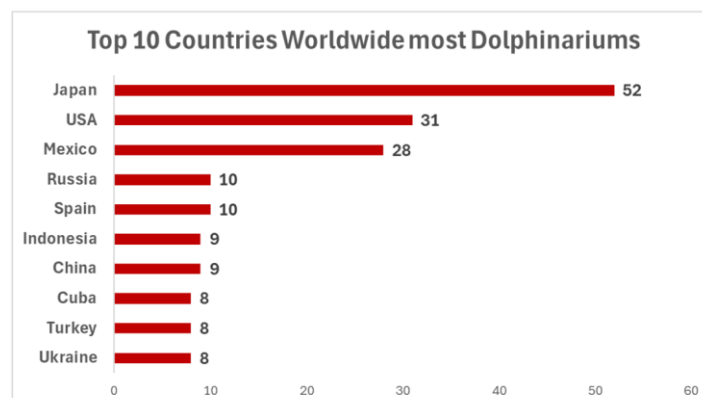
“An important message: the scientists who advise me, have unanomously asked me to bring this message. Dear audience, dear Members of Parliament, it is irresponsible to allow direct contact between cetaceans and visitors – children, pregnant women etcetera. This is irresponsible for both parties. It is dangerous for the dolphins, who may get ill. It is dangerous for the visitors, to whom diseases may be transmitted from the dolphins. It is stressful for the dolphins, who get in touch with unfamiliar visitors. Those people often do not understand the signals or language of the dolphins and it results in violence and accidents have happened.

You may have seen the documentary Blackfish on Netflix about orcas. Look at it, trainers have been killed, also in Loro Parque, with whom these people closely collaborate and the European Association for Dolphins, in Tenerife, also there a trainer has been killed by an orca. In Harderwijk, I have spoken with a trainer. When there was an orca there, at some point she was taken to the bottom of the pool, where the orca swam rounds with her, only to let her just in time surface to briefly catch breath and at once to return to the bottom. Those were tense situations and these do not only occur with orcas.

To a lesser degree with bottlenose dolphins, but also with bottlenose dolphins. I have seen how a trainer received a jaw-clap on a distance of just twenty centimeters. It is extremely impressive and I believe we should take responsibility for the security of dolphins and visitors by stopping this kind of behaviour. I’ve been asked to pass this information on here.”

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INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT



Countries with many dolphinariums are typically those with **less strict animal welfare laws** and where questionable practices occur, such as bull fighting (Spain), wildlife trade (China, Indonesia) and whaling (Japan). Dolphinariums are on the rise in countries such as China.

“What is the international, legal context? Well, I have listed here for you the top ten countries with the most dolphinariums. Number one, Japan – 52 dolphinariums, the USA on number 2, Mexico, Russia, Spain, Indonesia, China, Cuba, Turkey and unfortunately Ukraine as well. These are countries that do not have a strong reputation regarding animal welfare.

Look at Spain, where bullfighting is still allowed. Look at China and Indonesia – problems with wildlife trade, serious problems. Look at Japan, number one, whaling and capture of live dolphins for their meat, to feed animals and to bring to dolphinariums, even though European dolphinariums probably distance themselves from this.”

BOUDEWIJN SEAPARK

1. Boudewijn Seapark is owned by the **Spanish Aspro Parks**, which owns **68 amusement parks**
2. Aspro Parks owns **six dolphinariums** – in Belgium, the Netherlands (Harderwijk) and Spain (4)
3. Boudewijn Seapark is an amusement park with **more than 30 attractions** (such as the Orca ride roller coaster, Bobo's AquaSplash and Indoor Ice Rink)
4. In 2014 **one million Euro** was invested in Bobo's AquaSplash



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“Boudewijn Seapark is property of the Spanish Aspro Parks, which owns 68 amusement parks, six of these dolphinariums – four in Spain, one in Harderwijk and one in Bruges. Boudewijn Seapark is a Spanish dolphinarium in West-Flanders. Boudewijn Seapark has invested in more than 30 attractions. Besides the dolphinarium, they have an Orca Ride Roller Coaster, Bobo's AquaSplash and an indoor Ice Rink. This is an amusement park and I understand that they diversify and they have every reason to diversify, I believe. In 2014 one million Euro was invested in Bobo's AquaSplash. This Spanish Aspro Parks group is a financially powerful group within the European amusement industry. Let's not be mistaken. This is not a small family business, Boudewijn Seapark is part of a Spanish multinational.”

PUBLIC OPINION

“In 2015, an international online survey was conducted to investigate public attitudes on keeping cetaceans in captivity (N = 858). Respondents were significantly ($p < 0.001$) more likely to be opposed to displaying dolphins and whales in marine theme parks and aquariums (**opposed to captive display: 54.4%**; support captive display: 45.5%).”

Naylor & Parsons, 2019 in *Tourism in Marine Environments*



Source: <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427319X15627970573318>

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“What is the public opinion about keeping dolphins in captivity? Well, there are multiple surveys. Unfortunately not in Flanders or Belgium, but international surveys show time and again that nowadays the majority of the general public is against the keeping of dolphins in captivity. In this study 54.4% is against the keeping of dolphins, 45.5% is in favour. As representatives of the Flemish people these are important insights and I only would like to encourage an independent survey within Flanders.”

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT



The keeping of dolphins has been **legally prohibited or so strictly regulated that (breeding in) dolphinariums stopped in at least fifteen countries**, including Canada, Croatia, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Around **87 dolphinariums have closed** their doors over the last years.



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“More and more countries are against the keeping of dolphins and prohibit this. For example, in Canada keeping, breeding and importing dolphins is illegal. They are phasing out the keeping of dolphins in the few remaining parks. A similar situation with comparable or other stringent measures exists in for example Switzerland, France, Croatia, Luxembourg and Great Britain.

We are in touch with the French authorities. Those people are concerned about what happens with dolphinariums in their country, they are looking how they can negotiate a solution for the orcas, which are property of a private park.

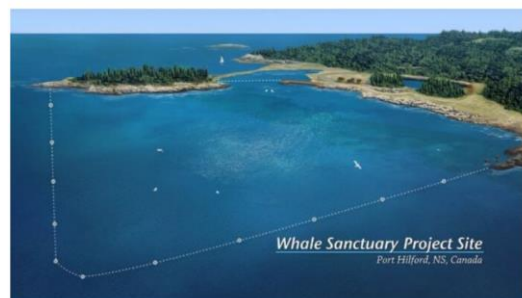
Talk to the Dutch authorities. They were upset when the orca sent from Harderwijk to Loro Parque turned out to need to perform tricks on music, as they apparently had been told that this was all about education and scientific research. Those people feel deceived. Talk to the Dutch authorities.

Dolphinariums are on the increase in China, but in countries which are actively involved with animal welfare more and more of these are closed. I've found nearly ninety as listed to have closed their doors over the last years.”

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“Seaside sanctuaries. I heard critical comments: “There are no dolphin sanctuaries operational yet; it’s taking years; it is expensive; it is dangerous; there are storms out there.” There’s a lot of criticism on sanctuaries. Wel, dear Members of Parliament, Dr. Jane Goodall had to face similar criticism during the 1990s, when she launched the first sanctuaries for chimpanzees in Africa. Some said it was too expensive, that you cannot collaborate with African authorities, that wild chimpanzees would invade, that chimpanzees would escape from sanctuaries. Well, Tchimpounga and other sanctuaries are very successful in Africa and are managed in a very professional way. There are more chimpanzees in sanctuaries in the USA than in zoos. Sanctuaries may be led in a professional way, let this be clear.”

WHALE SANCTUARY NOVA SCOTIA (40 HA)



Sea-side sanctuaries are more natural, spacious and varied. Therefore, these allow cetaceans a richer life with more autonomy for own choices.

“This project, the Whale Sanctuary project in Canada, is investigating to bring orcas and belugas to a bay, a protected bay of no less than 40 hectares, and is led in a very professional

way. Are they open already? No. Do they have the necessary permissions? Yes. Do they have the space? Yes. Are they doing scientific research to investigate how to keep the orcas and belugas? Certainly. Topnotch scientists are working on this.

Why should we prefer life in a sanctuary above a dolphinarium? It is more spacious, it is more natural, it is more varied. And, I asked one of our scientific advisers, whether it would be responsible to move dolphins from Bruges to a sanctuary in Greece or elsewhere. This person responded: “Well, those dolphins are doing shows. If they are fit enough for shows, then it will also work to transfer them in a professional way to a sanctuary.” But this is not about releasing them in nature, it is about professional care in semi-freedom, in a protected bay and not in an outdoor cage somewhere in the middle of the North Sea.”

NATIONAL AQUARIUM'S DOLPHIN SANCTUARY



“Our decision to build a sanctuary is rooted in what we believe to be best for the dolphins in our care. We have studied the issue and explored multiple solutions, ranging from rebuilding our existing tanks in a more naturalistic style to moving the dolphins to other accredited facilities. **After careful consideration, we've concluded that the best way forward is to create a protected, year-round seaside refuge.**”



Source: <https://aqua.org/support/dolphin-sanctuary>

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“I believe – even though this is a polemic debate – that we should collaborate, that there should be a dialogue and we are open for dialogue from the Jane Goodall Institute. People from the dolphinarium the National Aquarium in Baltimore came to the conclusion that it is ethically no longer justifiable to keep dolphins in a tank. They are investigating how to retire their dolphins in the neighborhood of Florida, or somewhere else, in a protected, semi-natural environment. And, it takes a long time, it requires a lot of preparation, but their aim is also to receive dolphins from elsewhere.

Well, if we bring the dolphins to the neighborhood of Florida, in the neighborhood of their original environment, then this would be much more natural than the Boudewijn Seapark in Bruges. I quote the part in bold: “After careful consideration, we've concluded that the best way forward is to create a protected, year-round seaside refuge.” Let us avoid unnecessary polemic, we can collaborate, also with the people of the Boudewijn Seapark.”



“Phasing out dolphinariums to seaside sanctuaries will finally give dolphins a dignified life to live out, without entertaining people, or swimming around in small tanks. When given the choice, most animals choose freedom and the ability to make daily choices themselves.”

Prof. Dr. Denise L. Herzing

Florida Atlantic University

40 years of long-term study of wild dolphins

Founder and Research Director of the Wild Dolphin Project

Member of the Cetacean Committee of the Jane Goodall Institute

“Professor Denise Herzing, who advises us, has forty years of experience with studying dolphins in nature near Florida. She is a world-leading dolphin authority and wrote to me: “Phasing out dolphinariums to seaside sanctuaries will finally give dolphins a dignified life to live out, without entertaining people, or swimming around in small tanks. When given the choice, most animals choose freedom and the ability to make daily choices themselves.” And this is what it is all about, autonomy, the possibility to make your own choices, also for smart sea mammals such as dolphins.”

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“And finally our conclusions and recommendations.”

CONCLUSION

1. Dolphins should **never have been caught** in the wild and kept captive
2. Dolphinariums cannot meet the needs of these complex social mammals and have created **tremendous suffering** and cost **many unnecessary deaths**
3. Dolphinariums are **monotonous environments** for complex, sensitive and intelligent individuals
4. Dolphinariums **cannot be justified** from a perspective of conservation, research or education
5. We need to do what is the **best interest of each individual dolphin**
6. The keeping and breeding of dolphins should be **legally prohibited**



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“Conclusions. First, dolphins should never ever have been captured in the wild. This was unethical behaviour. Dolphinariums are not capable of caring properly for complex social mammals such as dolphins, have caused tremendous suffering, which have cost numerous deaths. It are monotonous environments for complex, sentient and intelligent individuals. There is no way they may be justified from a perspective of conservation, research or education. We need to do what is in the very best interests of these remaining dolphins in Bruges. And this means that the keeping and breeding of dolphins in Flanders should be legally prohibited.”

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. Investment in **outdoor enclosure AND** aim for **relocation to seaside sanctuary**
5. **Permanent evaluation** with goal to relocate to seaside sanctuary
6. **‘Owner’ to take full financial responsibility** for retiring last cetaceans to seaside sanctuary



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“Recommendations. First, an immediate legal ban on breeding and importing cetaceans in Flanders. Second, an immediate legal ban on direct contact between visitors and cetaceans. Third, no more spectacular shows with loud music, which is seen as negative by the scientists that I have consulted, no matter what dolphinariums may claim. Only interaction – and indeed

there may exist a strong bond between caregivers and dolphins which is mutual, this is very well possible. Instead, there should be an interaction with enrichment and contact with the caregivers, no longer with a focus on entertaining the public and shows, but a focus on the dolphins. Visitors may potentially observe this interaction in silence from a distance. No longer fairground shows, no more sedentary circuses.

Investment on the short term in an outdoor swimming pool and hopefully as soon as possible transfer to a seaside sanctuary. It should have been there already a long time ago. Apparently, negotiations are lasting already ten years. Even when the dolphins will go to a sanctuary, it is not about 'or-or' but about 'and-and'. On the short term an outdoor swimming pool and as soon as possible to a sanctuary. The construction of a swimming pool – there are indications about 75 square meters, this is merely 7.5 on 10 meters. Constructing such a swimming pool occurs in some people's garden, though you need to be affluent for this.”

[At this moment Dr Koen Margodt was interrupted by the director of Boudewijn Seapark, Mr Lars van den Ham.]

“Please do not interrupt me, Mr van den Ham”

Mr Van den Ham: “If you provide incorrect facts per animal... “

“Well, then you may mention this a bit later, but not now.”

Mr Van den Ham: “Then I have some time for you in a moment.”

[A voice asks over the microphone to listen to one another. The President asks to round up given the lack of time.]

“I understand you and I would have liked to round up already, but Mr van den Ham has spoken about his education, well during my education I have learned it is extremely impolite to interrupt people during their presentation. I find this completely inappropriate behavior, Mrs President. I will now try to round up, at least if I'm no longer interrupted.

Immediate construction of an outdoor swimming pool, this is not a considerable financial investment for a Spanish multinational like Aspro Parks, and exploring the transfer of the dolphins to a sanctuary. Not an evaluation within ten years, but a permanent evaluation. Don't allow yourselves to be blackmailed that an outdoor pool is a compromise for no transfer to a sanctuary. We need to do what is the best for these individual dolphins. Is an outdoor pool in the interest of the dolphins – please, as soon as possible and later, when the dolphins have been transferred, hopefully a new destination can be given to the pool which is justified from an animal welfare perspective.

Finally, I believe that the Spanish owner of this amusement park needs to take up its full financial responsibility for the future of these dolphins. They complain about the investments they need to do. How much profit have they been able to make on the back of these dolphins since the 1960s? It's a small effort, it shouldn't be paid with money coming from the Flemish tax payers. It must be paid by the park that has been making profits for years, for decennia, out of these dolphins. Boudewijn Seapark can continue existing, staff can find a new job and may even work further with the dolphins, but we must be flexible and look towards constructive solutions.”



“Responsible tourism respects all animals. Therefore, there is no place for dolphin shows, wild animal circuses, elephant rides, trophy hunting or any activity which demeans, harms or disrespects them.”

Dr. Jane Goodall



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“Finally, a quote – I’m nearly finished – of Dr Jane Goodall: “Responsible tourism respects all animals. Therefore, there is no place for dolphin shows, wild animal circuses, elephant rides, trophy hunting or any activity which demeans, harms or disrespects them.””



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Credit images: R. Foster (slide 10), P. Fuller (sl 1 right, sl 11), GAIA (sl 19), D. L. Herzing (sl 5 top left, sl 29), M. Horrill (sl 5 top middle), L. Marino (sl 5 top right), Jo-Anne McArthur / Born Free Foundation / We Animals Media (sl 1 left, sl 33), Jo-Anne McArthur / One Voice / We Animals Media (sl 6), Miami Herald/TNS (sl 27 left), A. Natoli (sl 5 bottom left), S. Portelli (sl 12), S. Steyaert (sl 4), Studio Gang Architects (sl 28), C. Vinick (sl 5 bottom right), We Animals Media, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society in Rose, Solter and Parsons (2023) (sl 20), Whale Sanctuary Project (sl 27 right) and C. Whiting (sl 9).

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“Thank you very much for your attention.”