

Commissioner Stavros Dimas
Commissioner for the Environment
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
Bruxelles 1049

29th May 2008

Dear Commissioner Dimas,

Re: EU ban on keeping cetaceans in captivity

I welcome the fact that no cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) have been kept in captivity in the UK since 1993 and in Europe as a whole since 2003. However, I am deeply concerned that there is no actual legislation to prevent these animals being housed in captive facilities within the UK and indeed Europe in the future.

Cetaceans are intelligent, social animals with complex needs which cannot be met in captivity. There is in fact evidence to suggest that captivity causes serious physical and behavioural welfare problems.

While several countries have implemented legislation to either prohibit the import and keeping of cetaceans (Cyprus and Hungary) or prohibit the import of wild caught dolphins (Bulgaria and Portugal), there are currently 31 captive dolphin facilities in 14 EU Member States, with several more planned for the EU. It is unlikely that the current EU captive dolphin population will be able to supply the number of animals needed, and I am concerned that companies across Europe are involved with many overseas establishments which keep cetaceans in captivity. Many cetaceans are taken from the wild to supply captive facilities.

Wild animals kept in dolphinariums are often subject to high levels of stress and are not permitted to follow natural behavioural patterns. The enclosures in which these animals are kept are often inadequate, failing to provide either the space or the stimulation necessary for their well-being. The practice of keeping wild animals in such poor conditions has been condemned by many NGOs working in the field of animal protection, including the Viennese Environmental Advocacy and Eurogroup for Animal Welfare (the umbrella organisation for all EU animal protection groups).

Additionally, by its very nature, the dolphinarium environment means that humans and animals are in direct contact. Quite apart from the direct animal welfare considerations, therefore, there is the concern that - despite having usually been trained- the animals are nonetheless wild and potentially dangerous. There have been a number of unfortunate accidents involving wild dolphinarium cetaceans injuring people.

Consequently, in order to safeguard both people and wild animals, I am calling on the Commission to introduce EU-wide legislation specifically prohibiting the keeping of cetaceans in captivity other than in cases which involve short-term rehabilitation with a view to a release back to the wild in the case of injured cetaceans.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Lucas'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas MEP