

Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive
ABTA

Via e-mail: mtanzer@abta.co.uk

11 August 2021

Dear Mr Tanzer,

Exploiting whales and dolphins for entertainment at marine parks is cruel and outdated. Cyprus, Canada, Croatia, and India have banned cetacean captivity, and the world's first beluga whale sanctuary is now open in Iceland. As pressure mounts to reject this cruel industry, we, the undersigned, are writing to urge ABTA to update its *Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism* to add visiting facilities that exploit cetaceans for entertainment to the "Unacceptable and Discouraged Practices" list and to classify the keeping of cetaceans in captivity for entertainment as unacceptable.

Marine parks that keep whales and dolphins captive cause immense suffering to the animals they imprison. Orcas are complex, highly intelligent animals who have their own language and culture. In the ocean, they can swim up to 150 miles a day, but at marine parks, they're imprisoned in concrete tanks that are approximately 10,000 times smaller than their natural home range. The award-winning documentary *Blackfish* shows that the misery of captivity causes orcas at SeaWorld to fight, self-mutilate, and act aggressively towards the "trainers". The catalogue of scientific evidence demonstrating the suffering that captive cetaceans endure is extensive. It includes stereotypic "pattern" swimming, listless floating, high rates of infection, tooth damage, injuries from fighting, and early mortality. Whales and dolphins are highly social animals, but some individuals are kept in isolation in marine parks, and some are drugged with diazepam and other tranquilisers.

We can't protect whale and dolphin populations in nature while people are still capturing, breeding and trading these majestic animals for tourism and exploiting them for profit at marine parks. Bottlenose dolphins in nature swim up to 60 miles a day, dive to depths of nearly 1,500 feet, and maintain lifelong personal relationships with dolphins in their pods. SeaWorld packs 140 dolphins into just seven tanks at four theme parks in the United States, filled with chemically treated water, some of which are just 6 feet deep. The animals become frustrated by their confinement and can't escape attacks from other aggressive dolphins. The hit Netflix documentary *Seaspiracy* shows the distressing capture of wild dolphins who are sold to the tourist trade and the bloody killing of the rest of their pod. No one can in good conscience continue to support this exploitative trade.

It is outdated and counter to what we now know about animal welfare that ABTA does not have a policy regarding cetaceans in tourism. ABTA's *Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism* lists wild-animal performances among its "unacceptable" practices. Yet marine mammals endure a life of misery in concrete tanks and are forced to perform tricks for crowds of tourists. Given that there hasn't been any of these cruel attractions in the UK since the 1990s and major travel companies – including Airbnb, British Airways Holidays,

Booking.com, Tripadvisor and Virgin Holidays – have already adopted bans in response to customer feedback, it's unconscionable that ABTA lags behind on this important animal protection issue.

We urge ABTA to follow other tourism associations including South Africa's SATSA and The Netherland's ANVR and do the right thing for whales and dolphins. Please, urgently publish revised animal welfare guidelines to add visiting captive cetacean tourist destinations to the list of unacceptable practices.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

John McDonnell MP
Tonia Antoniazzi MP
Andrew Gwynne MP
Roger Gale MP
Caroline Lucas MP
Lisa Cameron MP
Sammy Wilson MP
Stuart McDonald MP
Henry Smith MP
David Amess MP
Animal Aid
PETA
World Animal Protection
World Cetacean Alliance
Whale and Dolphin Conservation

