



29 jan 2008

To: The Governor Mr. F. Goedgedrag
Adress: Kabinet van de Gouverneur van de Nederlandse Antillen
Fort Amsterdam 2
Curacao, Nederlandse Antillen

Cc: Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles Emily De Jongh-El Hage

From: Dr. Naomi Rose, Dr. Lori Marino, Susan Millward, Margaux Dodds, Richard O'Barry

Jan 25, 2008

Ref: Statement from international experts regarding the incident at Dolphin Academy on January 1, 2008

To the Honorable Mr. Frits Goedgedrag:

We, the undersigned, are writing to you regarding a recent incident at the Dolphin Academy in Curacao. It is our understanding that you have announced your intention of investigating the legality of the import of Cuban dolphins to Curacao. We wish to express our support for this plan, as we have concerns regarding the sustainability of the live dolphin trade from Cuba. We also wish to draw your attention to the following incident:

On January 1, 2008, at the Dolphin Academy on Curacao, three customers were injured, one apparently seriously, during a swim encounter. The incident occurred during a normal routine - a dolphin was instructed to jump over a pole held at either end by three people. A video clip showed that, instead of porpoising (jumping out of the water and over the pole, much like a horse jumping a fence, ending with the animal reentering the water head-first), she performed a breach (wherein the animal throws its body out of the water and then hits the surface with the length of its body). She landed directly on the three people holding the pole at one end.

The Dolphin Academy was quoted in the media as saying the incident was a 'miscalculation' by the dolphin, unrelated to stress or aggression.

After viewing the video clip of this incident, we disagree with this assertion. The dolphin was instructed to porpoise over the pole - she instead clearly performed a breach and landed on three people. Captive dolphins judge their movements in relation to people in the water very carefully and are extremely agile. They can judge distances well. This was highly unlikely to be a 'miscalculation' but rather a deliberate act. Although we do not know the circumstances surrounding this incident or what happened immediately prior to it, her behavior was possibly related to stress or dominance.

We hope our comments are helpful to you as you pursue your investigation of the Dolphin Academy.

Sincerely,

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