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## PRESS RELEASE

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### DOLPHINS EXPLOITED AND SUFFERING AT DOLPHIN LAGOON, SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE 12 SEPTEMBER – The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) expressed serious concerns over the plight of the Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins (*Sousa chinensis*) currently held in captivity at Dolphin Lagoon, by Underwater World Singapore (UWS)

ACRES, today, launches the ‘**Suffering, not smiling**’ campaign, which aims to raise awareness on the plight of dolphins and urge Singaporeans not to support marine parks that keep dolphins in captivity. The campaign is based on scientific and factual evidence that captivity is detrimental to the welfare of dolphins. It proves that research, conservation and education in dolphinariums, have minimal benefits to wild dolphins.

Although subtle and less visible, the greatest abuse suffered by captive dolphins lies in confinement itself. Dolphins are highly pelagic animals and have large home ranges of about 30-400 square kilometers in the wild. The Dolphin Lagoon in Singapore measures one hectare, this represents only 0.0003 per cent of the dolphin’s natural home range! Clearly, this is detrimental to the welfare of the animals.

Indeed, recent studies in the United States suggest that an inordinate number of captive dolphins are succumbing to typical stress-related illnesses such as heart attacks and gastric ulcers. It can hardly be sheer coincidence that virtually identical disorders affect millions of human beings forced to endure tedious and repetitive menial work. Natam, the female dolphin at Dolphin Lagoon had similarly died of a stress-related illness. She had succumbed to acute gastritis in 2001.

Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins are also notoriously shy animals. Forcing these shy dolphins to perform unnatural acts and forcing them to participate in contact sessions with humans further compromises their welfare. The unnatural acts during the dolphin shows also contradict earlier statements by UWS stating that the dolphins would not be made to perform tricks “which are unnatural”.

The contact sessions with the dolphins also exposes the participants to possible diseases from the dolphins. The United States National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has acknowledged that the potential exists for transmission of diseases between wild marine mammals and humans. Marine mammals are known to carry pathogens that can infect humans. As NMFS has noted, not only do bites from marine mammals carry a danger of infection, but there are a number of disease agents that are common to both humans and marine mammals and can be transmitted between them.

Outbreaks of infectious disease reported in dolphins include erysipelas, pasteurellosis, hepatitis, *Pseudomonas pseudomallei* infection, and systemic mycosis. While there has been no recorded incidence of human-dolphin disease transmission at Dolphin Lagoon, it should be noted that the recent diseases from animals also had no earlier recorded incidences.

The conservation and research value of keeping these dolphins in captivity is also doubtful. Research conducted on dolphins in captivity does not have the potential to improve the conservation of wild dolphins as the lives of captive animals are artificial. The extensive list of research on captive cetaceans

listed in the campaign report provide further compelling evidence of the limited potential of these captive research.

The limited value of captive studies and the increasing ability to conduct research on wild dolphins all undermine the case for the continued research conducted on captive dolphins. No genuine conservation organisation will deny the fact that conservation in the wild must take precedence over all other programmes.

Louis Ng, biologist and President of ACRES, said: “Progressive countries have already banned this cruel practice of keeping dolphins in captivity because it is impossible to cater to the needs of dolphins in captivity. They are sea creatures who need wide open spaces and keeping them in container-size lagoon will drive them insane. Natam, the female dolphin at Dolphin Lagoon had already succumbed to a stress-related illness. Jumbo, the male dolphin at Dolphin Lagoon is also showing signs of mental and physical stress. How much more will it take for people to realize that dolphins suffer in captivity and should belong to the vast open seas?”

Indeed, progressive countries such as the United Kingdom no longer have dolphinariums (since 1993). Similarly, Brazil, Israel, the state of South Carolina in USA and the state of Victoria in Australia have also enacted legislation making it illegal to keep marine mammals in captivity.

There is also a growing movement within the marine park industry to discontinue keeping cetaceans in captivity. The Weymouth Sea Life Park and Marine Sanctuary in United Kingdom states that: “Sea Life is committed to only displaying creatures which can flourish in our environment. Sea Life believes that whales, dolphins... should not be kept in captivity”.

Although there are still many unknowns, there have been a number of dolphin rehabilitation and release that points to this as a viable option for many captive dolphins. It is the view of ACRES that dolphins belong in the wild. ACRES is therefore campaigning for the rehabilitation and release of the dolphins at Dolphin Lagoon, back into the wild. This humane alternative will give these dolphins back their freedom and the lives they truly deserve.

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