

# Stopping Captive Dolphins from Performing in Aquariums!



Photo from: <http://www.ecorazzi.com/2013/05/22/india-becomes-fourth-country-to-ban-captive-dolphin-shows/>

## **Executive Summary:**

Dolphins are rapidly nearing extinction largely due to various human activities. As a top predator in the food chain, it is critical for us to take actions and start preserving the remaining dolphins.

## **Key Points:**

- Prevention of dolphin extinction is critical.
- Growing consensus to resist dolphin shows at aquariums
- International communities need to work together.

## **Introduction:**

Dolphins are top-level predators consuming a variety of fishes and squids and keep the ecosystem in balance, but 5 of its 40 species are close to extinction now.<sup>1, 2</sup> While the data for dolphin population around the world is lacking, research has suggested that over 95% of its mortalities is as a result of human activities<sup>2</sup>, such as habitat loss, commercial harvesting, pollution and climate change, and entanglement in commercial fishing gear.<sup>3</sup>

While dolphin endangerment is becoming a concerning issue, it must be noted that dolphins are important to the humans for three reasons. First, several similarities between dolphins and humans have been identified in recent years that were not even found between humans and apes. If humans were to truly understand their origins, more research is needed, and dead dolphins are certainly not as helpful as the living ones.<sup>1</sup> Second, though declining in population, dolphins are still top-level predators consuming a variety of fishes and squids and keeping the ecosystem in balance. Without a significant number of dolphins preying, then certain fishes and squids may exponentially reproduce without a natural predator, causing unexpected changes to the ecosystems. Finally, as dolphins are in the top of the food chain in the ocean, they serve as a “bio-indicator” that provides useful and valuable information to humans since both share the same the sea foods and consequences of pollution.<sup>3</sup>

## **Approaches:**

In May 2013, India has become the fourth country in the world to ban captive dolphin performing at aquariums, joining countries like Costa Rica, Hungary and Chile.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, over 70 aquariums across the world have joined the cause of saving dolphins in Japan after learning about its endangerment and the potential consequences.<sup>5</sup> The international dolphin preservation campaign began by focusing on Japan after an award-winning documentary

was released. Despite dolphin meat is still readily available in Japanese supermarkets, the available data suggests that approximately 10% of the dolphins caught went to the aquariums after buyers from Middle East, Japan, China and rest of the world carefully reviewing their age, size and health.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from the associated casualties occurred during dolphin hunting, research suggested that wild dolphins can live as long as 9 decades, but those captive ones rarely lived more than 10 years.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, with more aquariums now offer various interactive programs to closely interact with dolphins, not only do accidental injuries happen to both human visitors and captive dolphins, but dolphins also tend to live shorter as well.<sup>7</sup>

In a study conducted in South Asia, researchers have found an increase of 64.5% in dolphin abundance after a cessation of dolphin hunting was in place.<sup>8</sup> It follows that if the demand for dolphins decreases as aquariums stop purchasing young dolphins, then dolphin hunters will stop or harvest less dolphins due to less market demand. As a result, a recovery in dolphin population may be expected.

### **Conclusions-Implications:**

Since dolphin population data is largely unknown, we cannot assume that the current practice is sustainable. Therefore, while there are many contributing factors leading to a decline in dolphin population, we must start taking actions to prevent a permanent extinction of the remaining dolphins. Since some of the leading factors such as commercial harvesting and entanglement involve too many countries and jurisdictions, committing to banning captive dolphins in aquariums proved to be an effective solution that will address the issue while helping the overall situation. Now is the time to take actions for relevant law enforcements and policy makers to cooperate and start preserving the dolphins by enacting laws that prevent aquariums and similar organizations from importing more dolphins.

### **References:**

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