

Animal Protection Groups Call for Ban on Dolphin Petting Pools
New Report Sheds Light on Dangers to People and Dolphins at Marine Parks

Exploitation of dolphins in US amusement parks is being highlighted today in a new report launched by WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The groups are calling for the US Government to ban dolphin interaction programmes known as “Petting Pools”, and for the UK public to avoid visiting them, in response to research exposing their harmful effects.

The report, “Biting the Hand that Feeds, the Case Against Dolphin Petting Pools”, illustrates that Petting Pools, where the public are able to pet and feed captive dolphins for a fee, place both people and dolphins at risk. WDCS and The HSUS carried out almost one hundred hours of observation at Petting Pools found in Sea World parks across the US. The report exposes the unsafe, unsanitary and overcrowded conditions in which many captive bottlenose dolphins are forced to live.

The report shows many of the dolphins to be obese, due to inconsistent diets compounded by overfeeding from the public. “Adequate supervision of the public by marine park staff at the pools is impossible,” said Cathy Williamson, WDCS’s Captivity Campaigner. “Items like paper fish containers, sunglasses and coins have been seen tossed or dropped into the pool. These have the potential to cause gastrointestinal blockage, poisoning, or even death if ingested by the dolphins.”

“We believe that these pools could also be putting wild dolphin populations at risk by teaching visitors that it’s ok to feed dolphins.” Stated Courtney Vail, US representative for WDCS. “In our minds, there is a real conservation issue associated with Petting Pools.”

Petting Pool visitors are also at risk from physical harm. Due to their size and sheer numbers, dolphins frequently make abrupt and aggressive movements and occasionally

aggressively compete for food. Several incidents of bites, head butts and trapped hands were observed during the research.

As well as calling on the UK public not to visit amusement parks that include dolphin Petting Pools, WDCS and the HSUS are now calling for the US Government to ban these pools, which have fallen through the cracks of US Federal Government regulations.

“Since marine parks have yet to do the right thing on their own and government agencies refuse to include Petting Pools in their regulations, we are asking the US Congress to shut these exhibits down,” said Dr Naomi Rose, marine mammal scientist for The HSUS.

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Photographs and video footage are available from WDCS's UK office, see contact details above. The full report is available from WDCS or can be downloaded from: www.wdcs.org.