



Environment Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200  
300 Capitol Ave #5100  
Hartford, CT 06106

March 5, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of In Defense of Animals, an international animal protection group with 250,000 supporters and many in Connecticut, I respectfully urge the Connecticut General Assembly's Environment Committee to pass House Bill No. 5341, An Act Prohibiting The Sale And Breeding of Certain Cetaceans. If passed, this legislation would ban the breeding, selling, and public display of captive cetaceans in Connecticut.

It is well established that holding dolphins, orcas and beluga whales captive is inhumane. In the wild, these animals travel many miles on a daily basis and migrate long distances in search of food, but in aquariums they are imprisoned in cells which are infinitely smaller than their natural home ranges. These highly intelligent, social animals are relegated to swimming back and forth in tiny, barren tanks while visitors gawk at them. Overcrowding leads to aggression and many captive cetaceans are covered with open wounds, called "rake marks," that they sustain in fights. The stress of captivity also leads to stereotypical behavior and self harm. For instance, dolphins and orcas often grate their teeth on hard surfaces which leads to them becoming damaged and broken<sup>1</sup>.

The trivial "tricks" which cetaceans are compelled to perform in marine parks have no educational value or semblance to natural behavior. They only teach spectators that subjugating and exploiting wildlife for frivolous purposes is morally sound. This is reflected in a 2018 survey

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<sup>1</sup> Rally, H.D., Frohoff, T. *Dolphin exploitation and suffering at SeaWorld parks*. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, June 5, 2019.

which found that respondents who support cetacean captivity were significantly more likely to consider cetacean conservation unimportant.<sup>2</sup>

There is an imminent need for such legislation in Connecticut. The Mystic Aquarium (Mystic, Connecticut) recently requested a permit from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to import five beluga whales. If the permit is granted, these animals will be subjected to unnecessary stress during transportation and will be used to breed more belugas, who will also be condemned to life imprisonment. The Mystic Aquarium has partnered with the Georgia Aquarium, where some of the imported belugas will likely end up. The Georgia Aquarium has a history of questionable animal husbandry practices. In 2016, it was included on In Defense of Animals' list of Ten Worst Tanks for Dolphins and Whales<sup>3</sup> due to a shocking mortality record. Between 2012-2015, a total of five dolphins and three beluga whales died at the facility. A female beluga named Maris died at the age of 20 after watching two of her calves die when they were just a few days old.

This transfer's implications go beyond the individual belugas' welfare. These animals are descended from the Akhalin Bay-Nikolaya Bay-Amur River stock of beluga whales which the NMFS considers "depleted."<sup>4</sup> The Marine Mammal Protection Act forbids importing cetaceans from depleted populations for public display but the Mystic Aquarium is arguing that it is allowed if the display is "incidental" to research. This interpretation does not logically follow but could create a large loophole in the Act's protections for endangered species. Making such an argument at a time when federal environmental laws are under attack from many directions is irresponsible.

House Bill No. 5341 forbids importing captive cetaceans for public display and would terminate this transfer, thereby preventing its harmful animal welfare and conservation consequences.

If House Bill No. 5341 is instituted, Connecticut will join California and a number of countries including Canada, Bolivia, Chile, Croatia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, and France which have either restricted or outright banned cetacean captivity. I urge you to pass this important legislation and make Connecticut a more humane place for its aquatic nonhuman residents.

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<sup>2</sup> Rose, N.A., Parsons, E.C.M. *The case against marine mammals in captivity*. 5th edition (Washington, DC: Animal Welfare Institute and World Animal Protection), 160pp. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> *Ten Worst Tanks for Dolphins and Whales*, 2016. In Defense of Animals.

<https://www.idausa.org/campaign/cetacean-advocacy/ten-worst-tanks-for-dolphins-and-whales/>

<sup>4</sup> Designating the Sakhalin Bay-Nikolaya Bay-Amur River Stock of Beluga Whales as a Depleted Stock Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. A Rule by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. October 27, 2016.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/10/27/2016-25984/designating-the-sakhalin-bay-nikolaya-bay-amur-river-stock-of-beluga-whales-as-a-depleted-stock>

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Bridgeman', written in a cursive style.

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