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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

27th meeting
Strasbourg, 26-29 November 2007

Possible New File

**Planned capture of Bottlenose dolphins
(*Tursiops truncatus*) in Turkey**

REPORT BY THE NGO

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Dear Bern Convention Secretariat

I am writing on behalf of WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, to express our grave concerns at plans to capture 30 bottlenose dolphins in Turkish waters of the Mediterranean, Black, Aegean and Marmara Seas for Turkey's growing number of facilities offering dolphin assisted therapy to members of the public. These plans were confirmed in a letter from the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee Chair and discussed at a recent meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee.

We kindly request the Bern Convention Secretariat to contact the Turkish authorities to express concerns about these capture plans, which are contrary to the provisions of Article 6 of the Bern Convention for ensuring the special protection of the wild fauna species listed in its Appendix II, prohibiting "*all forms of deliberate capture and keeping*". The bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) is listed on the Convention's Appendix II of strictly protected fauna species.

Live captures

In its 2002-2010 Conservation Action Plan for the World's Cetaceans, the IUCN/SSC Cetacean Specialist Group notes: "*Removal of live cetaceans from the wild, for captive display and/or research, is equivalent to incidental or deliberate killing, as the animals brought into captivity (or killed during capture operations) are no longer available to help maintain their populations. When unmanaged and undertaken without a rigorous program of research and monitoring, live-capture can become a serious threat to local cetacean populations.*"¹

The need for a valid scientific assessment of an exploited cetacean population is supported by the abovementioned IUCN Conservation Action Plan, which states that, "[a]s a general principle, dolphins should not be captured or removed from a wild population unless that specific population has been assessed and it has been determined that a certain amount of culling can be allowed without reducing the population's long-term viability or compromising its role in the ecosystem."

Little is known about the status of bottlenose dolphin populations found off the coast of Turkey. With no population estimate available for dolphins in Turkey's waters, any removal of animals for public display purposes would seem inexcusable and irresponsible. In fact, a recent workshop of experts

¹ Reeves, R.R., Smith B.D., Crespo, E.A. and Notarbartolo di Sciara, G. (compilers). 2003. Dolphins, Whales and Porpoises: 2002-2010 Conservation Action Plan for the World's Cetaceans. IUCN/SSC Cetacean Specialist Group. IUCN. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. P.17

assessed the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin as “Endangered” under the IUCN Red List criteria and the Mediterranean bottlenose dolphin subpopulation as “Vulnerable”.

At the 12th Conference of the Parties to CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, a proposal was approved to retain the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin on CITES’ Appendix II but with a quota set at zero for the export of live dolphins wild-captured in the Black Sea for primarily commercial purposes.

The declining population of the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin lives in what can arguably be described as the most degraded sea in the world. It has been the subject of past mass hunting and is significantly threatened by trade in live specimens for the captivity industry. Since the 1960s, many hundreds of bottlenose dolphins have been captured alive in the Black Sea and used for military, scientific and commercial purposes. Mortality during transport and captivity of bottlenose dolphins from the Black Sea is extremely high.

Alexei Birkun notes in an ACCOBAMS report on the cetaceans of the Mediterranean and Black Seas,² that the methods used to capture dolphins in the Black Sea have resulted in high pre-export mortality: *“The capture operations, carried out by means of the purse-seining, sometimes accompanied by solitary and serial deaths of bottlenose dolphins as a result of strong stress and asphyxia”*. There is little information about deaths during capture and it can be assumed that such losses typically go unreported. We are very concerned that similar problems may occur as a result of any captures in Turkish waters. Dolphin captures can be very violent and result in the deaths of the individuals targeted and other members of their group during, and shortly after, capture. In fact, captures of dolphins have been shown to result in a six-fold increase in mortality risk during and immediately after capture.

Bern Convention and dolphin assisted therapy

Article 9 of the Bern Convention allows Contracting Parties to the Convention to make exceptions from the provisions of Article 6 for the purposes of research and education, but not for dolphin assisted therapy (DAT).

WDCS has a series of well-substantiated concerns about interactions between humans and dolphins in dolphin assisted therapy programmes. They include the welfare of the animal; the risk of aggression towards people; the potential for disease transmission from human to dolphin or vice versa; the fact that dolphins may be forced into interactions with humans and have little respite from these actions, and the fact that in so many DAT and other interaction programmes, dolphins are captured from the wild and are transported thousands of miles to suffer the effects of confinement in captivity.

A paper published in 2003 entitled, *“Can dolphins heal by ultrasound?”*³ investigated the possibility of dolphins being able to heal by ultrasound. The researchers determined that under very specific circumstances the ultrasound emitted by dolphins could, theoretically, have an affect on biological tissue, in terms of its intensity. However, the other key factor is the duration of exposure. The researchers noted that, on average, the individual patients in the study each received less than ten seconds of ‘ultrasound therapy’ and therefore rejected the hypothesis that dolphins exhibited behaviour that resulted in patients’ exposure to ultrasound in doses comparable to those in medical treatments.

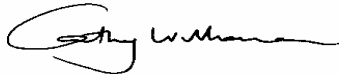
² Birkun, A. 2002. Conservation Problems: Direct Killing and Live Capture: Black Sea in Notarbartolo di Sciara, G (editor). 2002. Cetaceans of the Mediterranean and Black Seas: State of Knowledge and Conservation Strategies. ACCOBAMS/MOP1/Inf.6

³ Brensing, K.; Linke, K. and Todt, D. 2003. Can dolphins heal by ultrasound? Journal of Theoretical Biology 225 99-105

Another study evaluated research into the effectiveness of DAT for improving the cognitive, physical, or social-emotional behaviours of young children with disabilities.⁴ A comprehensive review of six DAT studies concluded: “*The studies included in this synthesis are so plagued with methodological flaws that claims that the reported outcomes are due to dolphin assisted therapy may be erroneous*” and further that: “*the results of the synthesis do not support the notion that using interactions with dolphins is any more effective than other reinforcers for improving child-learning or social-emotional development... Therefore, the outcomes of the studies cannot conclusively be attributed to the intervention [of DAT].*” The researcher, Humphries, also concluded that: “*Claims of the effectiveness of using dolphins as a procedure for improving the behaviours of young children with disabilities are therefore not supported by available research evidence.*” Despite claims from the advocates of DAT, there remains no concrete evidence for the long-term benefits of this type of therapy.

We kindly request your attention to our concerns about the proposed capture of 30 bottlenose dolphins in Turkish waters and that the Bern Convention Secretariat contact the Turkish authorities with its own concerns about such captures by a Party to the Convention. Thank you very much for your attention to this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



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⁴ Humphries, T.L. 2003. Effectiveness of Dolphin-Assisted Therapy as a Behavioral Intervention for Young Children with Disabilities. Bridges Practice-Based Research Syntheses. Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development. Volume 1, Number 6. May.