



FILE COPY

THE MARINE CONSERVATION BOARD

**P.O. Box 486 GT, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, BWI
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Aug 21st, 2003

The Honourable McKeeva Bush
Minister of Tourism, Environment, Development, and Commerce
Government Administration Building
George Town, Grand Cayman
BWI

Dear Sir,

Members of the Marine Conservation Board have been approached by the public inquiring as to the Board's position on the issue of captive dolphin related facilities in the Cayman Islands.

While it is somewhat late in coming, we feel obliged to submit our position on such for the matter of record, and in view of what it can convey to our image as a tourism destination known for its marine resources their conservation.

Without taking up your time with already much talked about detail, we would only pose the following with respect to the issue of cruelty, as well as inappropriateness, of such a facility here.

Unlike the well flushed, naturally maintained and regulated sea water inlets of the Yucatan and Cuba, the proposed shore-based locations within the North Sound for these facilities in no way approaches the standard of water quality or space required to maintain the physical or mental health and comfort of dolphins that would be kept captive there.

Even should such conditions be achieved (there, or elsewhere on island), it has been widely accepted by the scientific community that dolphins are more predisposed to the adversities of captivity than are most other animals. So while it may not be the kindest of acts to keep monkeys or lions in a zoo, it is downright cruel to keep captive in any restricted enclosure, this animal whose physiological and psychological needs are so acutely adapted to, and inextricably linked with, the open ocean environment.

It is because of this that there is more global controversy over captive dolphin facilities than over zoos. Indeed, there are a growing number of localities whose various experiences have led them to discontinue permitting such facilities.

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While it is a fact that there are other Caribbean destinations with dolphin facilities (of varying standards and repute), none of them has our international reputation in marine conservation which to date we have successfully exploited in local tourism development. The promoting of the image of this unique product, however, could be undermined if dolphin shows are allowed to be established locally. For example it could portray the Cayman Islands as a 'Johnny-come-lately' gimmicky destination scrabbling for whatever available tourism dollar there is remaining in the wake of the economically devastating terrorist attack of 9-11. Given this, such 'attractions' will not effectively contribute to the country's tourism, but indeed may have the opposite effect when potential visitors realize that we no longer have any unique quality experience to offer in preference to those of a number of other, lower cost, destinations.

Allowing such a controversial item on our tourism 'menu' with the potential to create negative international publicity may serve only to compromise any attracting power of our image thus far, and would be significantly counter-productive in further developing the Cayman Islands as an environmentally responsible, proactive, marine-based tourism destination. The potential for this becomes much more of a reality when considering that three such facilities, vying for the same limited market, will probably not be able to operate economically to the point where they can meet the costly requirements to properly maintain these animals in captivity in the most humane way possible.

We thank you for your time and acknowledgment of our position on this controversial issue.

Sincerely,



for Don Foster, Chairman

cc. Director, Dept. of Tourism
C.A.V.O., Dept. of Agriculture
Cayman Islands Tourism Association

