

# RESPONSE TO THE INTRODUCTION PLAN OF A RESCUED *Orcinus orca* INDIVIDUAL IN THE ORCA OCEAN GROUP

*Compiled by the Free Morgan Group, July 21 2011*

## SUMMARY

This document has been written to offer a response to and to refute the Introduction Plan presented by the Dolfinarium Harderwijk to the CITES Commission, in order to obtain a CITES Permit to move the orca known as Morgan from the Netherlands to the facilities of the Loro Parque, Tenerife, Canary Island, Spain. Points are numbered to facilitate the refuting process.

## DETAILS

Each point addresses a different part of the original Introduction Plan by the Loro Parque (LP) and the refuting process is done with citation of the original text extracted from the Plan and a subsequent response by the Free Morgan Group (FMG)

**1- “..... initial treatment consisted of saline infusions and broad spectrum antibiotics. Blood analysis revealed an inflammatory reaction, microcytic regenerative anaemia and mild dehydration. Clinical inspections during the initial period after her admission including multiple advanced research techniques for viral and bacterial diagnostics of multiple organ systems (respiratory, digestive, and renal) revealed no other gross pathology than dermatitis and severe malnourishment.”**

FMG: According to LP, Morgan’s health is now perfect. Any health issue can not be used to justify the decision to keep her captive.

**2- “...Genetic analysis indicated Morgan is related to the Norwegian sub-population of killer whales. It cannot completely be excluded Morgan originates from the Icelandic sub-population of killer whales. (Andrew Foote).”**

FMG: We already extensively discussed our position regarding the DNA samples/tests and their results, please see document titled “Response to van Elk” (Section 7(p)).

**3- “Vocal data again indicated Morgan originated from the Norwegian population of killer whales that hunt for Norwegian Spring Spawning herring. She is likely closely related to the "NP" pod although not originating from this pod based on present data. Due to lack of data on the vocal repertoires of this population it is not possible to give more detail on her origin than the entire population of NSS hunting killer whales.”**

FMG: H. Vester, as part of her ongoing research, is currently recording this specific population; therefore further information and data are now available to attempt to search for a match with Morgan's vocalizations. Such material was not available when the “Seven Experts” were consulted by the Dolfinarium.

**4- “Due to the difficulties to find the origin of Morgan, Dolfinarium Harderwijk consulted a group of independent experts the feasibility of her release back to the sea, and they unanimously concluded that the best option for this whale is to be cared for in an appropriate facility with the highest standards of animal husbandry, preferably in the company of other killer whales in order to meet her social needs.”**

FMG: More information and scientifically robust data are now available on the acoustic repertoire of the NSS population (Heike Vester personal communication). It may be possible that the calls of Morgan’s original family are part of the new recordings made by Vester.

This particular section of the plan cited does not report that the “appropriate facility” must be a tank and/or pool and we would strongly recommend that a semi-natural facility is the most appropriate until Morgan is ready for release.

**5- “...During the rescue and recovery of Morgan, imprinting on humans has taken place”**

FMG: Imprinting is the process through which early social preferences become restricted to a particular object or class of objects (e.g., see Bolhuis, 1991)<sup>1</sup>. Despite extensive searches through the literature, we could find no documentation of imprinting in cetaceans. Therefore, we contacted Dr. Marino, of the Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology Program, at Emory University, Atlanta, USA who stated: *“In twenty years of studying cetaceans I have never heard of or have come across evidence that imprinting occurs during*

*development in cetaceans. Imprinting is a very specific psychological process that is defined as a rapid and relatively immutable learning occurring during a critical stage of development. (It is not equivalent to attachment. All mammals attach but not all imprint.) I know of no evidence to support the claim that cetaceans imprint during development.”*

<sup>1</sup> BOLHUIS, J. J. (1991). Mechanisms of avian imprinting: A review. *Biological Reviews*, 66:303–345.  
doi: 10.1111/j.1469-185X.1991.tb01145.x

**6- “...Loro Parque...with high handling standards and optimal care for this species, and also with research, conservation and educational activities...”**

FMG: with regards to husbandry techniques, education and general management, we produced abundant evidence of how at the very least the current and past situations at Loro Parque are questionable.

**7- “From the educational point of view, Morgan would join the rest of the animals in performing the awareness activities carried out with the general public and school groups. These include: awareness raising workshops, video conferences, tours, presentations, audiovisual materials, etc.”**

FMG: The sentence structure in Point 7 suggests that other “awareness activities” are alluded to, but are not defined. Given that the main focus of Orca Ocean is entertainment shows, it would be not be difficult to assume that these are included in the ‘other’ activities alluded to. If that is the case, then clearly Morgan could be subjected to at least three shows a day, which is clearly in violation of what they are applying for, with respect to her being moved to Loro Paque.

In addition to this, for workshops, video conferences, tours, presentations, audiovisual material there is no reason to keep Morgan captive: the park has already four adult orcas and a calf that can help raising the awareness in people. Abundant audiovisual material of Morgan already exists, in high definition format, which can be used for educational purposes. There is no reason that this cannot be expanded at Deltapark Neeltje Jans, with the added bonus of an educational theme of reintroduction and release.

**8- “Adan....., a calf who was born at Loro Parque in October 2010. Since the link between mother and calf was not established after birth, he was hand raised from the first day of his life, without direct contact with the rest of the group. Currently the process of introducing Adan to the group of orcas in Orca Ocean is underway. The introduction of a baby (much smaller than the rest of orcas in the group) represents a challenge, as any social displacement or agonistic behaviour by any member of the group could cause serious injury. This made necessary a detailed planning and care in every step of the introduction. As a result, the process of introduction of Adan is an experience that ensures optimal training of Loro Parque staff for the introduction of Morgan.”**

FMG: Orca Ocean staff had to intervene and help this calf to survive by hand feeding and nursing; Adan has been kept for over six months by himself and he is still not completely reintroduced in the group because, the reintroduction process is still going on and there is no way to know if it will be ever completed successfully. It's unfortunate that a calf was not accepted by his own mother (the motivations of which are not known to the FMG) and therefore isolated, but in such conditions we question the intention of introducing yet another young individual to the group. In the Introduction Plan of LP no contingencies are reported to address the particular case of Morgan not adapting to the new group and vice versa.

We speculate, after analyzing the previous strategies adopted by LP and by SeaWorld we assume that two possible scenarios may occur:

a. Morgan can't adapt to the other adult orcas and therefore must be kept separate in a different pool. This would be inhumane and cruel because Morgan would still be in acoustic contact with the other orcas but no physical interaction would be possible and she would have to spend her life in isolation knowing that a few meters away there are conspecifics. In essence the end result would differ little from the current situation she is held in, whereby she can see and hear bottlenose dolphins but is prevented against her will from interacting with them.

b. Morgan can't adapt to the other adult orcas and therefore will be transferred to another facility.

This would be unfortunate and very stressful for Morgan because the whole acclimatization procedure would need to be repeated again in the new facility, with no certainty of success. The transfer then would have to be repeated again in case the adaptation would not take place at the next venue. Each time

Morgan is moved she is subjected to the associated risks and stress.

**9- “Initially Morgan will be housed in the medical pool, since the lifting floor greatly facilitates the manipulation of the animal in case is necessary. This will be her main accommodation pool during every phase of the introduction to the group....”**

FMG: As reported in the Introduction Plan by LP, the medical pool measurements are 7.1 x14.4m, with a depth of 4.2 m; therefore, this pool is considerably smaller than the tank in which Morgan is currently kept at the Dolfinarium Harderwijk, which is now the smallest tank in the world to hold an orca. Given that the LP Plan does not define the length of time that Morgan will be held in the medical pool it is possible that this could be quite extensive, ranging from weeks to perhaps even months. During that time her welfare will therefore will be significantly compromised.