

Dr Henk Bleker (State Secretary) Ministry for Agriculture and Foreign Trade & Dr F van Dijken
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24 September 2011

Re: *Loro Parque* has misrepresented the situation, with respect to the orca known as “Morgan”

Dear Dr Bleker & Dr van Dijken,

My name is Dr Ingrid Visser and I am marine biologist, specializing in orca (killer whales). I have been researching wild orca for over 20 years now and work with them primarily in New Zealand waters. My specialty is to enter the water and swim with them whilst they hunt.

Please see www.orcaresearch.org and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingrid_Visser_%28researcher%29 for profiles of my work.

I am writing to you regarding the very poignant situation which has developed involving the young female orca now known as “Morgan”. You are aware that the entertainment park *Dolfinarium Harderwijk* has determined that Morgan should be sent to the entertainment park *Loro Parque*, in the Canary Islands. Their reasoning has been two-fold;

- 1) There is research being conducted with the orca at *Loro Parque* which will fulfill the EU requirements for a wild-born orca to be exported there, and;
- 2) That the orca currently held at *Loro Parque* will become Morgan’s ‘adoptive’ family.

Point 1), has already been clearly discredited. It has been shown to be nothing more than a thin veneer and that *Loro Parque* is no more than just an entertainment facility, not a research facility. This evidence was presented to the Honorable Judge Kijlstra on the 3rd of August 2011 and showed the attempt of *Loro Parque* to credit themselves as a research facility, to be a farce. Should you require more information on this, I would be happy to supply it.

Regarding **Point 2)**, however, **recent evidence has come to hand which is vital in respect of your decision regarding Morgan’s future;**

- (a) Please see the **attached photographs** illustrating bite marks on the orca ‘Tekoa’, currently held at *Loro Parque*. You will note that these photographs were taken just last week. As you are also aware, the orca at *Loro Parque* are not comprised of a natural family, but rather are a human-induced artificial group. As such they have been noted as being aggressive (not only to humans – where numerous attacks have been reported, including the death of trainer Alexis Martinez on the 24th of December 2009) but also to each other, as evidenced by the bite marks on Tekoa.
- (b) On the 9th of September 2011, a meeting between staff of your Ministry, the *Dolfinarium Harderwijk*, *Loro Parque*, members of the Orca Coalition and the Free Morgan Foundation was held at Den Hague. During that meeting a staff member of *Loro Parque* stated that the **orca at *Loro Parque* are integrated and freely socialize with each other. This is a misrepresentation of the facts.** Given that I had also been previously informed that *Loro Parque* had not integrated their orca, and to investigate the claim made above, by *Loro Parque*, I travelled from New Zealand to the facility and spent three days (16-18 September 2011) observing their orca held in four tanks. During these three days I was at the park for approximately 90% of the opening

hours (0830-1845 hrs), observing the human-controlled distribution of the orca and observed nine 'shows'.

It is of particular note that at no time during these three days were all five orca in the same tank. At the most, three orca were allowed access to the same tank and this was primarily during show-times when the animals behaviours were under control of the trainers and they were 'distracted' by food and commands to perform.


Additionally, the importance of the situation for the orca 'Adán' should not be overlooked. He was born at *Loro Parque* in October 2010. He had to be separated immediately from his mother due to her aggressive actions towards the calf. Since its birth this calf had been kept isolated from the other orca for most of its life. It was separated in a 'medical pool' measuring only 4.2x7.1x12.4 m (= 369.77 m³). This 'medical pool' is approximately 15% smaller than the tank Morgan has been held in for the last 15 months (3x7.1x20.4 m, = 434.52 m³).

Loro Parque have stated that it is into this very same 'medical pool' that Morgan will be placed during her proposed 'introduction' to the *Loro Parque* orca. They have not specified how long Morgan will be held in this tank, but in the context of Adán has remaining in this tank as his primary holding facility for nearly one year, is an indication of the likelihood that the same will apply to Morgan. This time frame may even be longer given that Morgan is an unrelated individual. Young Adán has only recently begun to be introduced to the other orca held at *Loro Parque*, in what appears to be a need to vacate the 'medical pool' to make it available for the proposed arrival of Morgan.

Again, we note here that the staff member from *Loro Parque* stated that the orca of their entertainment park were socialized, yet during the three days that I observed these animals, for approximately **80% of the time, Adán was kept separate from the other orca and in the "medical pool"**. For approximately 10% of the time he was socialized with one other orca which for the majority of the time appears to either ignore or shun him directly. For the remaining 10% of the time, Adán is held in a tank with two other orca, who again, appear to either ignore or directly shun him. I have video and photographs to illustrate these aspects, should you require them. Although I was not able to inspect Adán at close quarters, there were visible bite marks on his skin.

Therefore it is my professional opinion that the attempt by *Loro Parque* to portray the orca currently held at *Loro Parque* as a complete and fully socialized 'family' of orca is a misrepresentation of the real situation. This leads to a conclusion that *Loro Parque* is not an appropriate location for Morgan to be transported to. If you would like further information on any aspect outlined here, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Dr Ingrid N. Visser
Orca Research Trust

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