



CAPTIVE DOLPHINS FOUND HELD IN FILTHY, UNDERSIZED POOL. COMMUNITY OUTRAGED. "PAPERS IN ORDER", CLAIMS OWNER.

Red Sea governorate finds itself at the centre of animal-rights crisis with international scope, as local community attempts to piece together tragic, complex story of inhumane, international trade in gentle bottle-nosed dolphins

A day ago, HEPCA received several reports from members of the local community, denouncing the discovery of dolphins kept in appalling conditions, in a private villa pool in Hurghada

Relevant local authorities were immediately contacted to request clarification and additional information. The HEPCA team, including dolphin specialists, was authorised on the 15th of September 2010 to visit the villa, where it found four common bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), two males and two females, all measuring between 2 and 3 meters, kept in a tiny, filthy swimming pool.

Aside from the fact that ANY pool is neither long, wide nor deep enough, national regulations exist in various countries, specifying acceptable dimensions of the main enclosures for common bottlenose dolphins: according to the Brazilian Institute for the Environmental and Natural Renewable Resources, a minimum of 14 meters horizontal distance, a minimum depth of 6 meters and a minimum volume of 1600 m³ is specified for two animals. The volume for four animals should be at least 2400m³. The HEPCA team found the four dolphins in a pool measuring 9mx9m and 4m deep, adding up to a volume of 324m³, only slightly above one tenth of the minimum required size. Other than the pool's tiny size, the water conditions were appalling, with a visibility of approximately 20 cm, probably due to a filtration system unable to cope with the large amount of excreta naturally produced by the animals.

The HEPCA team was informed that the dolphins come from Japan, and are supposed to be the main attraction of a new dolphinarium currently under construction in the Hurghada area. According to Egyptian regulations, they are required to be kept in quarantine for a minimum of 105 days, to ascertain that they are healthy and able to perform.

HEPCA did not have the opportunity to examine all the documents, so the question of whether those dolphins were caught in the wild in Japan or are coming from captivity is still open. This information is very important to define the legal framework that might regulate this specific case. All rumours that the source of these dolphins is the Egyptian Red Sea are false! .

It is important to stress that -incredibly enough- various international and national governmental authorities granted all the permissions needed to enable this terrible situation to exist. HEPCA and the Red Sea Governorate firmly oppose, and are determined to fight against any activity which involves the trade, shipment or captivity of dolphins in the governorate..

The lack of national legislation in Egypt regarding dolphin captivity, whether pertaining to the establishment of dolphinariums, or to requirements regarding the humane treatment of the animals, leave the situation totally unregulated, leading inevitably to tragic situations like the one we are presently facing.



After the Red Sea Governorate learned about the four dolphins, they officially defined their position against holding dolphins in captivity within the borders of the Red Sea governorate. We hope that this will include the cancellation of the planned dolphinarium in Hurghada, before it opens its gates. Hopefully too, promulgation of new laws will prevent this from happening again.

Unfortunately, there is not much that can be done for the four dolphins. The issue is very complex and must be rationally, objectively analysed, primary, humane goal to provide them with better conditions. They cannot be released into the open sea - as they are not native to the Red Sea, introducing them into the wild would create a risk of genetic and disease contamination that could affect the health of the local bottlenose dolphin population. Furthermore, chances of the dolphin's survival and quality of life in case of release are slim: it would be important to understand if the dolphins were born in captivity or caught at sea. The probability of survival depends primarily on the time spent in captivity. Additionally, if they were born in captivity, they will not have developed the skills needed to survive in the wild and so there would be no hope for them to survive in the sea.

All that can be done now is to improve the conditions in which they are kept: It is urgent to provide them with more space and better water quality, conforming to international standards. This might be achieved by intervention at the swimming pool where they are presently confined, or creating a new tank to care for them until the end of the quarantine period, before moving them to their final destination. Another issue arises then: transfers are very stressful events for dolphins which seriously risk further weaken these already suffering animals, and should therefore be minimised. We all desire to rescue these animals, and in order achieve this without further harm, all factors must be carefully considered.

HEPCA is in constant contact with the relevant authorities and the relevant international associations. We are determined to act in the most responsible way to help these four individuals and, at the same time, intent on making it clear that this must never happen again. This kind of situations will never be accepted by the Red Sea Governorate, by HEPCA nor by the community which, today has joined the battle.

Egyptian waters offer incredible opportunities to see wild marine animals in their natural environment, including one of the most famous marine protected areas in the region, the so called "Dolphin House", Samadai Reef. Egypt is actively working towards the conservation of its national environmental treasures; we don't want the Egyptian Red Sea to send out a contradictory message allowing the captivity of intelligent, social marine mammals such as dolphins. We will lobby vigorously, for the passing of new laws to make the Red Sea Governorate free from this heartbreaking, inhumane business.

We are asking everyone out there to spread the news concerning this inadmissible situation; but please be aware that rumours and falsifications are not helpful. Kindly invite everybody interested in this story, to follow up through the HEPCA website or by directly contacting HEPCA Team. This is a critical moment in which rational thinking, not emotion, must guide our actions. Impulsive acts or brash statements, may well end up being detrimental to the health and well-being of the animals.

As this story develops, HEPCA will keep the community informed with regular updates. Please be sure to check out our website www.hepca.com and our newsletters.

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