

The WDC Report is Factually and Technically Incorrect

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Synopsis: Nuremberg Zoo's corrections to the 2019 report "Free - My Home Has No Walls" by the WDC (Whale and Dolphin Conservation)

In 2019 the WDC (Whale and Dolphin Conservation) published a background report on the subject of dolphin husbandry in Germany with the title "Frei - mein Zuhause hat keine Wände" (Free - My Home Has No Walls). The report focuses on dolphin husbandry in the dolphinariums of the Nuremberg and Duisburg Zoos. In the report, the author and former WDC Policy Manager David Pfender misquotes scientific publications, misinterprets publications and makes both factual and content-related errors. The WDC report can, therefore, only be viewed as campaign propaganda. A detailed error analysis compiled by the Nuremberg Zoo can be found in the corresponding "counterstatement" at tiergarten.nuernberg.de/zoowissen-co/forschung/forschung-artenschutz.html.

An objective and scientifically correct WDC report would certainly have been more helpful to government agencies and political decision makers. As an institution that keeps dolphins, we rely on knowledge and not on populist rhetoric to protect the animals in zoos and the oceans.

Key shortcomings of the WDC report are:

1. Incorrect data: The WDC report contains glaring errors, mainly due to a lack of research. Particularly striking are the data (number/names of animals, deaths, numbers, years, etc.) concerning dolphin populations in Nuremberg and Duisburg. Although this data is publicly available and therefore easy to obtain, 56.8% of the data is incorrect.
2. Demands contradictory to animal welfare: The WDC report makes demands that are contrary to animal welfare in their scope or in their impact on individuals and animal populations. For example, demanding breeding bans: breeding is an important part of social behavior and relevant to animal welfare. Other demands, such as the transport ban, violate international regulations and guidelines. The primary objective of animal populations - including those managed by humans - is to maintain a high level of genetic variability. In order to achieve this, the transport of individuals from one zoo to another is crucial.
3. Pseudo-scientific terminology: The report uses terms such as *freedom*, which are not used in science-based behavioral biology. Essentially, an animal seeks to satisfy its needs, for example with the intake of food or the avoidance of harm or danger. Meeting both its daily physical and psychological needs takes up the majority of the active time available to an animal. This also applies to dolphins in captivity. Humans provide food, breeding opportunities, a low risk environment and good medical care. In summary this means: in a human controlled animal environment, humans provide safety, the most important need of a living being.
4. Obsolete premises: The WDC report addresses the welfare of dolphins in dolphinariums. WDC's main arguments for speaking out against dolphin holding use the dimensions of the tanks or their layout in a multi-tank system. The report ignores numerous scientific publications that show that the behavior of the animals in multi-tank systems is highly variable and does not indicate any behavioral

disorder. To determine wellbeing based on numbers related to the volume, area and swimming distances is scientifically the wrong approach. The right approach is to study and analyze the behavior of the animals on-site to detect any possible abnormalities. For years, veterinarians and biologists working with dolphins in captivity have been developing methods to objectively evaluate their welfare. A first approach was discussed in 2015 at an international meeting organized by Nuremberg Zoo, where the WDC was also present; further meetings followed. Currently, the Welfare Committee of EAAM (European Association for Aquatic Mammals) is developing a scientifically researched evaluation method to assess the welfare of dolphins in dolphinariums.

5. The call for closure of dolphinariums: This is a complete contradiction of the currently accepted strategies in international species protection. Experts agree that the One Plan Approach (OPA) launched by the IUCN - SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG today CPSG) in 2013 is the framework to ensure the conservation of biodiversity on our planet. It requires the cooperation of zoo (ex situ) and wildlife (in situ) experts. According to the OPA, the conservation of animal species does not only mean the protection of animal populations in their natural habitats, but also includes the work of zoos and aquaria to research, manage and breed animal species. Especially for endangered species, the implementation of the One Plan Approach is the last chance to preserve them. In this context, zoos and aquaria play an immensely important role, especially because they possess the professional expertise to manage small populations.

In summary, the report misses the goal of providing the public discourse with objective and scientifically based facts, and leaves the impression that it is exploiting biased interpretations for campaign purposes. It is the duty of organizations and institutions dedicated to animal welfare to communicate the true state of scientific knowledge. Politicians and policy makers who make decisions based on facts rely on this science. As those responsible for dolphin husbandry in Nuremberg, we always strive for objectivity and it remains our goal to aspire to higher standards in the analysis and interpretation of data. It is therefore our duty to point out these shortcomings, to scientifically review misinterpretations and to present the facts.