

An Open Letter to Dr. Gerald Dick, Executive Director
of the World Association of Zoos and Aquarium (WAZA)
17th January, 2014

Dr. Gerald Dick, Executive Director
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Dear Dr. Gerald Dick,

Thank you for your reply to our petition. In our previous petition we asked you to take strong action to make the Japan Association of Zoos and Aquariums (JAZA) comply with the WAZA Code of Ethics and require that all JAZA-affiliated facilities immediately stop obtaining dolphins through the drive hunts in Japan.

To our regret, your reply didn't include any concrete measure to answer our petition, and completely contradicted WAZA's statement that "cruelty to any animals is not acceptable." We, the following three Japanese organizations, have been waiting for WAZA's practical action for nearly ten years since the WAZA took a position against dolphin drive hunts in Japan, noting that: "the catching of dolphins by the use of a method known as 'drive fishing' is considered an example of such a non-acceptable capture method."

In your recent reply, you mentioned that "As you know, in some Japanese communities these drives have been part of the culture for centuries." This claim is incorrect. The drive hunt in Taiji was and is not Japanese culture. It is a shame that this erroneous reason/excuse is the rationale for WAZA not to take an action based on "the Code of Ethics."

In fact, the history of dolphin hunting in Taiji is short. According to "The History of Taiji," edited and published by Taiji town in 1979, the first recorded dolphin drive was in 1933, with subsequent hunts occurring in 1936 and 1944. It was not until 1969 that dolphin drives have been conducted on a large scale. The history of the dolphin drives spans not so-called 400 years, but a mere 45.

Furthermore, in 1969, the main goal of the dolphin drive was to capture pilot whales as prized showpieces for the Taiji Whale Museum. In other words, the dolphin drive was purely for profit, having nothing to do with cultural history. Since 1969 a close relationship began building between the drive hunt and aquaria as financial activities.

Considering WAZA's Code of Ethics, we believe that even culture and long history should not be acceptable reasons to inflict pain and agony on wild animals. Though you replied that "WAZA member facilities place animal welfare at the forefront of all animal acquisitions," JAZA still allows its members to acquire dolphins from extremely cruel drive hunts, and, as we wrote you in previous petition, the number of dolphins caught using these unethical capture methods has only been increasing.

Our request:

We sincerely request again that you take urgent action to make JAZA stop its member aquariums from buying and trading dolphins obtained from the drive hunt. Please reply, indicating to us what you will do to implement our request. What we heartily request is your concrete plan to support the conservation and ethical treatment of dolphins by ending your member aquariums' procurement of dolphins from the Taiji drive hunts. As we explain in detail above, the drive hunt is not Japanese culture or tradition, so there is no need to refrain from acting against the drive hunt as a matter of cultural sensitivity. We previously petitioned JAZA to abide by the WAZA Code of Ethics. However, JAZA replied to us that they did not recognize any problem as long as JAZA follows the laws of Japan. Clearly, JAZA has no intention to observe WAZA's Code of Ethics. If JAZA continues to violate the WAZA Code of Ethics, JAZA should be disqualified from remaining as a member of the WAZA, and should be expelled from the WAZA. On the other hand, allowing JAZA to remain a part of WAZA weakens WAZA's authority and credibility.

Yours sincerely,

Sakae Hemmi, Elsa Nature Conservancy

Yukari Sugisaka, Help Animals

Sachiko Azuma, Put an End to Animal Cruelty and Exploitation (PEACE)