

April 10, 2025

## **URGENT: 31 Beluga Whales Stranded at Marineland Canada - Their Welfare at Risk**

The Honourable Joanne Thompson  
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans  
200 Kent St.  
Station 13N100  
Ottawa ON. K1A 0E6  
Canada

Email: DFO.Minister-Ministre.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Dear Minister Thompson,

As you may be aware, representatives for Marineland Canada sought and received approval to divide its property into four parcels, with reports stating that the: "Owner has secured third-party bridge loan financing that requires the Owner to remove the marine animals from the property expeditiously."

On behalf of the millions of members of non-profit organizations listed below, we request your help safeguarding Marineland Canada's captive beluga whales now facing a precarious future. 31 belugas are currently being held by Marineland Canada, and, in line with Canadian law, transfers of belugas for entertainment, commercial sale, and breeding purposes are strictly prohibited. Furthermore, relocating belugas to facilities with concrete tanks would contradict the intent of Canadian law to safeguard cetacean welfare. The captive belugas should be relocated to seaside sanctuaries.

### **1. Current Health Status:**

We urge you to require an independent veterinary assessment of the current health status of the belugas at Marineland Canada.

Belugas and other cetaceans held in concrete tanks suffer from numerous health problems, stress, boredom, and shortened lives. We are concerned about the high beluga mortality at Marineland. Reports indicate that 18 beluga whales have died there in the past five years. Many of these belugas were well short of their mean life expectancy. Further, Eos, a beluga whale only seven years old, was reportedly euthanized at Marineland in February 2025. An independent veterinary assessment could also assist in determining whether the belugas are healthy enough to be moved safely.

### **2. Relocation to Sea Sanctuaries:**

We urge you to require that the relocation of belugas be to certified seaside sanctuaries. Seaside sanctuaries provide a far larger and more enriched environment and round-the-clock professional veterinarian care. Belugas would be freed from the stresses of performing and from being confined in small concrete tanks. They would have healthier conditions and far better water quality. This outcome is the most consistent with the spirit and intent of Canada's 2019 law, the Ending Captivity of Whales and Dolphins Act (also known as the "Free Willy Bill").

There have been momentous changes in public attitudes around the world regarding keeping orcas and other cetaceans in concrete tanks. Canada deserves great credit for enacting legislation prohibiting the establishment of new facilities that would hold any whales and dolphins in captivity, other than the grandfathered Marineland Canada.

France, the USA, the EU, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have all taken steps to prevent new facilities from holding captive cetaceans, end breeding in captivity, and in some cases, closing down existing concrete tank facilities holding cetaceans.

### **3. Prohibiting Transfer to Concrete Tanks**

We are extremely concerned about reports that Marineland Canada is seeking buyers for the belugas from commercial entertainment facilities. By far the dominant importers of captive cetaceans are China and Japan. Facilities in these countries are engaged in theatrical whale shows and also offer swimming with dolphins and small whales.

Neither of these countries has any history of importing belugas for research purposes. Chimelong Ocean Kingdom, for instance, does not have a thriving research program with belugas, with only two papers published analyzing dolphin vocalizations. It is our view that if buyers from these locations propose to purchase belugas from Canada for research purposes, they would likely be doing so to evade stipulations of Canadian law.

Animal welfare laws and enforcement mechanisms in both Japan and China are weak and significantly less robust than those in Canada, the USA, or the EU. The French government recently denied export of two orcas from Marineland Antibes in France to Japan because of the lack of regulatory enforcement of animal welfare standards in Japan. There were no enforceable guarantees that welfare standards and restrictions would be upheld. The same concerns apply to China.

The future of these captive beluga whales now hangs in the balance, and we appreciate your consideration of these recommendations. We are willing to assist the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada in helping determine a path to provide healthier lives for the belugas at Marineland.

Respectfully,

#### **Canadian Organizations:**

Animal Justice, Canada

CATCA Environmental and Wildlife Society, Canada  
Double Bay Sanctuary Foundation, Canada  
Humane World for Animals Canada  
No Whales in Captivity, Canada  
Save the Whales!, Canada  
Whale & Dolphin Conservation – North America  
World Animal Protection Canada

**International Organizations:**

Action for Animals, US  
Animal Legal Defense Fund, US  
Animal Welfare Institute, US  
Born Free Foundation UK  
Born Free USA  
Brazilian Humpback Whale Institute  
Brazilian Institute for Nature Conservation – IBRACON  
British Divers Marine Life Rescue, UK  
Cetacean Society International, US  
Dolphin Connection, US  
Free Willy/Keiko Foundation, US  
Grupo de los Cien, Mexico  
International Animal Rescue, UK  
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute, US  
Marine Connection, UK  
Orca Conservancy, US  
The People for Ethical Treatment of Animals, US  
Pro Wildlife, Germany  
TerraMar Research, US  
Whale & Dolphin Conservation, UK  
World Animal Protection, US  
World Animal Protection, US