

I, Dr Ingrid N. Visser (PhD), submit here a report; **Regarding ‘sexual acts’ with a dolphin at Aspro Park Dolfinarium Harderwijk**. I write this brief report as an expert in the field of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) as I have been researching these animals for over 20 years. I am based in New Zealand and although I specialise in orca (*Orcinus orca*), I have observed bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus* & *Tursiops aduncus*) in many areas around the world, in both wild and captive settings.

I have visited the *Aspro Park Dolfinarium Harderwijk* (DH) six times on the following dates; 20-23 June 2011, 07-08 June 2011 and 23 September 2011, during which, each time I observed the dolphins, porpoises, orca and pinnipeds.

Additionally, on the 16th of November 2011, I chartered a helicopter and flew over the DH to observe the animals, as the park was closed to the public and it was not possible to obtain any information from the staff about the status of the animals.

I have prepared this report because of my grave concerns about the situation of using the bottlenose dolphins for what can only be termed ‘sexual acts’.

RAMBAM TV SHOW

Recently I was sent a link to a video of the TV show by RamBam, that originally screened in the Netherlands and was available online on the 2nd of March 2016 (http://www.npo.nl/rambam/02-03-2016/VARA_101378109). The version I refer to here is the same as the original, but it has subsequently been sub-titled in English and is posted on YouTube: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmcSleLLwbc>). The TV show investigates the use of dolphins in a circus and also exposes the use of dolphins in ‘sexual acts’. The TV show is in reference to the *Aspro Park Dolfinarium Harderwijk* (DH), Strandboulevard Oost 1, 3841 AB Harderwijk, Netherlands.

From this point on I refer to the English version of the video described above, as the reference for time-codes and subtitles. I note that there are a number of references to ‘AI’ (artificial insemination). One of these (at 17m04s) “that [the masturbating] is for artificial insemination”

There is graphic video starting at 15:34 running until 15:59 (25 seconds) showing a male trainer masturbating a male dolphin. The trainer is seen to give the dolphin food afterwards, reinforcing the behaviour. At no time during this video footage is a receptacle present for the semen to be collected (which would be the case, if the animal was being used for an AI program). The ‘intern’ and the trainer discuss how far the semen is ejaculated and the volume, but at no time is collection discussed.

Even if this was a training session, it would be appropriate to have the receptacle at least present as this ‘desensitizes’ the animal to it (that is, it won’t be afraid of the receptacle if it suddenly appears).

An example of such a receptacle can be seen in the collection of the semen from an orca (and note, that the trainer (Brian Robeach) states “when he sees this bag he will roll over and present his penis and ideally he will submit that semen sample”). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aUqtI5dp70>

Without a receptacle, there is no way that the event filmed by RamBam can be part of an AI program.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

The *Dolfinarium Harderwijk* is apparently part of at least one study using Artificial Insemination (AI) (e.g., see O’Brien & Robeck, 2012, page 470, where they are recorded as contributing a single sample). However, the DH have not published at any length or volume in peer-reviewed scientific publications (that an online search revealed). That is, there are no papers which reveal in any details their involvement, contributions, success or failures with regards to AI of bottlenose dolphins.

Furthermore, they do not publish the bottlenose dolphin stud-book (which is curated by the veterinarian of *Dolfinarium Harderwijk*, Neils van Elk). This is a standard practice for endangered species (e.g., see the listings for the Red Panda <http://cza.nic.in/redpandastudbook.pdf>).

It should be noted that the bottlenose dolphin is **not** an endangered species. The species is bred in captivity exclusively for stocking aquariums and zoos. No captive-born release program is in place to assist with conservation of the species at any facility, worldwide.

However, the value of these animals in the commercial trade between aquariums has resulted in AI becoming so refined in the commercial industry that sex-selection has reached such a high level of accuracy that 10 out of 11 calves that are predetermined, based on sex selection, are born as prescribed (Robeck et al 2013). A trainer explains that to some degree in the RamBam TV show at 16m32s where he says “*now we can get a male or a female*”.

In another study (where six pre-sexed calves, all of the predetermined sex were born in captivity; see O.Brien et al (2009), the Dolfinarium Harderwijk is thanked for collaboration in the project [“*We also acknowledge the following institutions for their collaborative efforts toward the development and application of sperm sorting and ART {assisted reproductive technology} in wildlife:Harderwijk Dolfinarium,*” ... p105]

Regardless, although the DH may claim they are involved in AI programs, such contributions do not justify the abuse done to the dolphin in the video.

AGGRESSION & SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

The sexual act was filmed in the ‘sluice’ between the main show tank (under the dome) and the ‘back tanks’ to the east of the dome. Earlier a trainer (who’s face is obscured’) is noted as commenting that the dolphins (all males) have sex together.

Male-male sexual behaviour in this group of dolphins is likely driven by the unnatural crowding and the keeping of an all-male group of dolphins in such deplorably small tanks. An unidentified female (trainer?) is heard to say (at 14m14s) “*scratches*” [from fighting among each other]; “*They are all males, yes, they don’t work it out properly by talking*”.

Aggressive behaviour such as this is likely exacerbated by the fact that the dolphins are masturbated within sight of the other dolphins. For example, in the video, at 15m56s, the tail flukes of a second dolphin can be seen to the right of the frame. It is unclear what is happening with that dolphin, but the close proximity would ensure that the dolphin is aware of the masturbation by the trainer, ongoing right beside him. Additionally, the gate to the back tanks is only wire mesh and the dolphins held in the tanks are able to acoustically, if not visually, anticipate what is going on, creating more aggressive tension in the group.

Despite decades of research into both captive and wild dolphins, there are only two studies which have been published that have focused on male-male sexual behaviour in dolphins (Mann, 2006 (*Tursiops aduncus*); and Ostman, 1991 (*Tursiops truncatus*)). There are three other publications that record anecdotal observations (observations in passing) of male-male sexual behaviour in dolphins (Caldwell & Caldwell, 1977; Irvine et al, 1981; and McBride & Hebb, 1948). Three of these five studies (Ostman, 1991; Caldwell & Caldwell, 1977; and McBride & Hebb, 1948) were in captive situations and all describe the male-male sexual behaviour in the context of aggression.

It may be claimed by the DH that ‘all male’ social groups are ‘normal’ however they would be distorting the data. For instance, Wells et al (1987) found only 16% to 23% were all-male groups of bottlenose dolphins. Additionally, it must be kept in mind that the dolphins in the Wells et al (1987) study were wild and therefore free to come and go as they please and were choosing to form these social groupings. This is in direct contrast to the dolphins at DH, which have no choice, are forced to be with dolphins that they may dislike and are subjected to dominance and

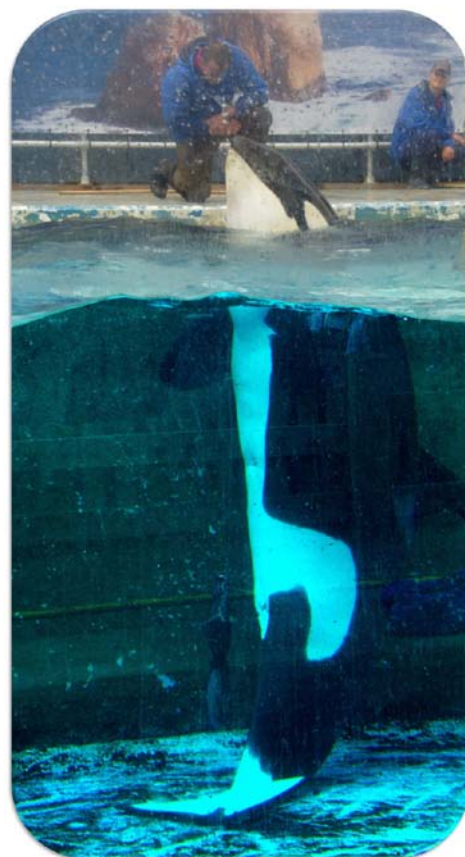
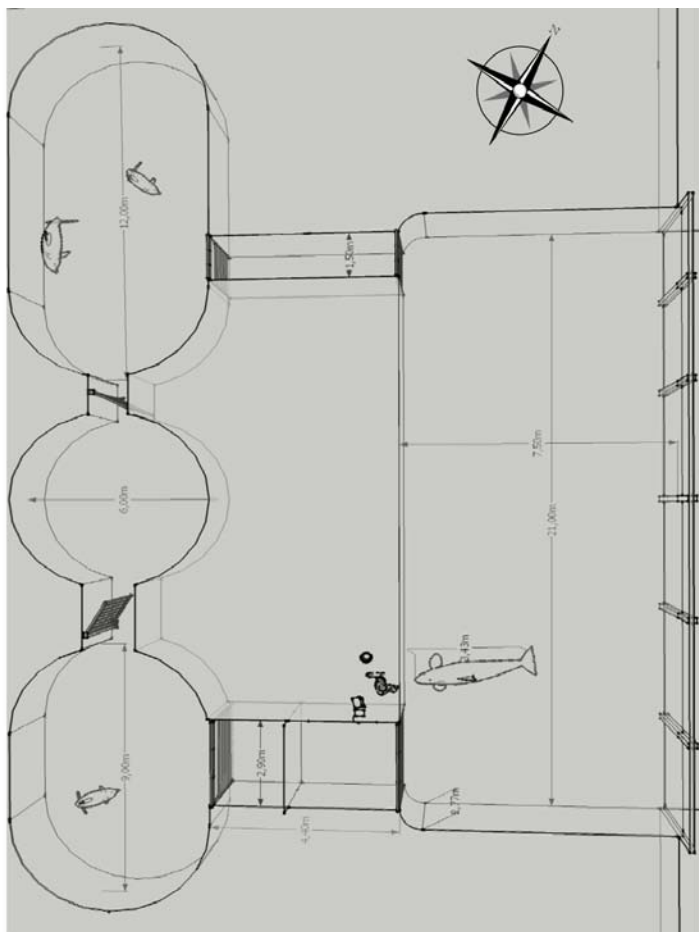
aggression related male-male sexual behaviour, from which they cannot escape due to the extremely confined areas they are kept in. Signs of tension are seen in the video at 14m47s, where two of the dolphins can be seen jaw clapping (a very strong sign of aggression).

The layout of the tanks in relation to the 'dome' circus area, is shown in ANNEX 1 of this report. These tanks were the ones discussed in the RamBam video at 13m16s and are not shown on the DH park 'map'. Nesim Ahmadi (the 'intern') states "There are 14 show dolphins and they are not in the show basin. You also have a different map of the Dolfinarium. And this is what people actually do not see. This is the show basin, where people can just come and see the shows, but behind it, the backstage area actually, where nobody can come, there are all these little basins where they actually sit the whole day." Note that at 13:m37s, the TV show indicates where the map is missing these tanks.

TANKS

The size of the tanks has been described in a thesis (Neves dos Reis (2014) The figure is replicated here for clarity (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Left. Drawing of tanks extracted from Neves dos Reis (2014), page 14. An orientation compass is added for clarity here. Dimensions are given as Northern most tank (upper left of drawing) = 12mx6m, middle circular tank = 6m diameter, Southern most tank (lower left of drawing) = 9mx6m and the tank on the eastern side (right of drawing) = 21x7.5m. Right. Photograph showing 'Morgan' a 3.43m orca unable to hang vertically in the water and with her head partially out of the tank, indicating how shallow the water is for the dolphins who use this tank (i.e., less than 3m deep). Of note is that this tank (on the eastern side and therefore the larger of the tanks) was completely off-limits to the dolphins for the 18 month period that Morgan was held in DH.



It is possible to confirm that this was the same tank that Morgan was held in based on the surrounding artwork that the DH still has in place from when Morgan was held there in 2011. This includes graphics of a large orca, 'orca food' and the backdrop of a rugged coastline (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Top. Three dolphins leap with the large orca graphic in the background, which was also the backdrop to the public area where Morgan was displayed in 2010-2011. Bottom. A single dolphin leaps, with the same graphic in the background, but with a smaller graphic showing how much food an orca eats.



SUPPLEMENTARY POINTS

Additionally, in the TV show it can be heard that the spokesman for the *Dolfinarium Harderwijk* states (at 02m17s) that the dolphins “live in a natural habitat and that they show normal, natural behaviour.” I would like to note here that I have visited the *Dolfinarium Harderwijk* and I was appalled at the conditions that the animals were kept in.

Even in the ‘lagoon’ the dolphins were separated into smaller areas (please see Figure 3). I observed a number of the dolphins in the ‘lagoon’ exhibiting graphic stereotypic behaviours (abnormal, repetitive behaviours that have no outwardly obvious function and which are typically considered a sign of stress from a captive environment). An example of such a stereotypy can be seen in the video when the male dolphins in the tiny tanks, swim upside down and clap their jaws (at 14m47s in the video).

In the video, at 02m33s Linda Hakeboom from the TV show asks again “You’re saying they live under natural conditions. Is that true?” The spokesman goes on to state “We have 10 million liters water in our pool, it’s a natural habitat.” This very misleading as; (1) there are extensive areas of the lagoon tank which are extremely shallow areas in the lagoon; (2) others areas that are fenced off, preventing the dolphins ever using them and (3) yet other areas which are fenced into smaller areas and which the dolphins are kept penned in (again, please see Figure 3 and details below). The DH spokesperson goes on to say that “They don’t live in a small tank” and she asks again “They are not in a small tank?” and he replies “No, no, no”. Of note is that at the time of the TV show, 21 dolphins lived in this small area (17m36s in the video).

I note these points because large sections of the lagoon are not openly available to the dolphins and as such the *Dolfinarium Harderwijk* is again misleading the public. In the video at 05m27s the TV show have greyed out the area around the ‘lagoon’ to highlight the lagoon and presumably the area that the dolphins have to swim in.

However, to make it very clear, the section of the ‘lagoon’ to the upper left is for the ‘Krabbenjust’ (and the dolphins do not have access) and the area to the upper right of the ‘lagoon’ is for the walrus (and the dolphins do not have access to it). The area to the lower left is for the pinnipeds (and the dolphins do not have access to it). Please see the map attached, from the *Aspro Park Dolfinarium Harderwijk* (ANNEX 2).

Figure 3. A close up ‘3D’ rendition of the area shows the areas of concern.



If the reader goes to Google Maps and uses the 'earth view' version, they can view for themselves that the area to the south and south west is fenced off for the pinnipeds, the area to the north west is fenced off for the fish and other marine life and the area to the north is fenced off for the walrus. <https://www.google.co.nz/maps/place/Dolfinarium/@52.3527535,5.616254,170m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!3m1!1s0x47c633d4eae9d9c3:0x697dcb9282600b9!6m1!1e1>

Additionally, the areas to the east are all fenced off and the dolphins separated into smaller pens. By zooming in on these areas it can be seen that at least 14 dolphins are in the 'lagoon' area, at least four pinnipeds in the south and south west pens and at least four walrus are visible in the show area and pens designated for the walrus.

ALTERNATIVE LOCATION FOR THE 14 MALE DOLPHINS

Although not directly within the scope of this report, it should be noted that these male dolphins could be moved to another of the *Aspro Park* facilities, *Aspro Park Delta Park Neeltje Jans* (<http://www.neeltjejans.nl/>). It has a large (at least 275m across) sea-pen enclosure. That enclosure has been used for the rehabilitation of harbour porpoises in the past. *Aspro Park Delta Park Neeltje Jans* is located within the Netherlands and therefore no transport permits would be required to move the dolphins out of the show tanks and away from the sea-circus and as such, it is hoped the sexual acts. Please see for information <http://www.asproparks.com/nuestros-parques/netherlands/?lang=en>.

USE OF THIS REPORT

You may use this report as you see fit (for filing with the police, in court ,or for any other venue you deem appropriate), in order to stop the *Dolfinarium Harderwijk* performing these sexual acts with the dolphins. You have my permission to use this report for quotes, or in its entirety.

Should you require any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me. I would be more than happy to speak with anyone in authority who is making an investigation and discuss the content of my report and my personal observations at the *Dolfinarium Harderwijk*. Should you wish me to appear in the Netherlands as an expert witness, please contact me so we can make arrangements for this to happen.

Respectfully



Dr Ingrid N. Visser (PhD)

10 March 2016

ingrid@orca.org.nz

www.orcaresearch.org

REFERENCES

- Caldwell, M. C. & Caldwell, D. K. (1977) Social interactions and reproduction in the Atlantic bottlenose dolphin. In: Breeding dolphins present status, suggestions for the future, ed. S. H. Ridgway and K. Benirschke. 133-142. Final report. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Mammal Commission.
- Irvine, A. B., Scott, M. D., Wells, R. S. & Kaufmann, J. H. (1981). Movements and activities of the Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*, near Sarasota, Florida. Fisheries Bulletin. U.S. 79: 671-688
- Mann, J. (2006) Establishing trust: socio-sexual behaviour and the development of male-male bonds among Indian Ocean bottlenose dolphins. In: Homosexual behaviour in animals. An evolutionary perspective. Eds. Sommer, V. & Vasey P. L. Pp 107-
- McBride, A. F. & Hebb, D. O. (1948). Behavior of the captive bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*. Journal of Comparative Physiology and Psychology. 41:111-123.
- Neves dos Reis (2014) "Temporal change in the calling behaviour of an isolated killer whale (*Orcinus orca*)". Master's thesis, available from: <https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/81417/2/107842.pdf>.
- O'Brien, J. K., and T. R. Robeck. (2012) The relationship of maternal characteristics and circulating progesterone concentrations with reproductive outcome in the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) after artificial insemination, with and without ovulation induction, and natural breeding. *Theriogenology* 78.3: 469-482.
- O'Brien, J. K., Steinman, K. J. & Robeck, T. R.. (2009) Application of sperm sorting and associated reproductive technology for wildlife management and conservation. *Theriogenology* 71.1: 98-107.
- Ostman, J. (1991) "Changes in aggressive and sexual behavior among two male bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in a captive colony." *Dolphin Societies: Discoveries*.
- Robeck T. R, Montano, G. A., Steinman, K. J., Smolensky, P., Sweeney J, Osborn, S., O'Brien, J. K. (2013). Development and evaluation of deep intra-uterine artificial insemination using cryopreserved sexed spermatozoa in bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*). *Animal reproduction Science*. 139:168-181.
- Wells, R. S., Scott, M. D. & Irvine, A. B. (1987) The social structure of free-ranging bottlenose dolphins. *Current mammalogy*. 1: 247-305.