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*An international organization dedicated to conservation through public display, education, and research*

**Testimony before the House Committee on Agriculture  
State Capitol, Honolulu, Hawaii  
By Kathleen Dezio, President & CEO  
Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums  
March 22, 2017**

I am writing on behalf of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA) to urge you to vote no on H.R. 136 and H.C.R 208, “Urging Hawaii Facilities that Hold Captive Cetaceans for Entertainment Purposes to Discontinue Breeding and to Phase Out Captivity.”

The Alliance is the preeminent trade association and accrediting body for zoos, aquariums, and marine parks throughout the world that exhibit marine mammals. Our mission is to support the highest standards of care for marine mammals and to contribute to their conservation in the wild through public education, and scientific research. Our 63 accredited institutions throughout the world, which include three facilities in Hawaii, Dolphin Quest Hawaii, Dolphin Quest Oahu, and Sea Life Park, collectively possess the largest body of marine mammal experience and expertise in the world.

Dolphin Quest has been a leader in establishing best practices for husbandry, environmental enrichment and veterinary care and is widely recognized as a world leader in dolphin care, conservation and education. Dolphin Quest provides training opportunities for behaviorists, veterinarians, researchers, educators, and animal care staff who travel to Hawaii from around the world to learn from their expertise, which in turn raises the bar for the marine conservation education and the care of dolphins world wide. Dolphin Quest also continues to provide training workshops for volunteers and veterinarians participating in Hawaii’s training network to enable them to gain the skills necessary to handle wild cetaceans in distress. Without these workshops, generations of volunteers and veterinarians will have no opportunity to gain these critical skills. Ironically, decades before the National Aquarium in Baltimore, which is referenced in the resolution, proposed the concept of an ocean sanctuary for its dolphins, Dolphin Quest established, in your state, the very concept of natural ocean-fed habitats or "sanctuaries" for the public display of dolphins.

Another AMMPA-accredited facility in Hawaii, Sea Life Park, is well known and highly respected for its rescue and rehabilitation work and care for native Hawaiian marine animals. The facility has a permit from the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration to display endangered Hawaiian monk seals and educate visitors about them and the risks they face in the

wild. It has taken in three marine mammals that needed a permanent home after residing at a University of Hawaii research facility. Sea Life Park also operates a sanctuary for 22 different species of sick or injured Hawaiian seabirds that will never be able to return to the wild. Open 24 hours a day, its Seabird Rehabilitation Center, which treats hundreds of seabirds each year for injury, exhaustion, dehydration or illness, has cared for more than 25,000 birds since its inception. This is especially important during shearwater fledgling season in November and December when young birds are learning to fly by using the stars and moon at night to help them navigate, often becoming disoriented by human-generated bright lights and flying until they are exhausted. The facility also has the only captive green sea turtle breeding program in the U.S. and has released 15,000 hatchlings into waters around the island and works to raise public awareness with turtle exhibits in several locations in the islands.

To become an accredited member of AMMPA, a facility must demonstrate in accreditation and subsequent re-accreditation inspections that it meets or exceeds our rigorous Standards & Guidelines covering a dozen different areas from animal husbandry, animal training, and water and environmental quality to education, scientific research, breeding, transportation and more. These standards, based on the expertise of thousands of veterinarians, animal care specialists, operations personnel, and scientists throughout the world, are meant to optimize the physical health of and environmental conditions for individual marine mammals in each facility's care and maximize their educational and scientific impact.

Contrary to many of the statements in H.R. 136 and H.C.R. 208, science shows that dolphins and other marine mammals in accredited marine parks, zoos and aquariums thrive and live as long as or, in many cases, much longer than their counterparts in the wild. They receive high quality, nutritious food, regular and preventative veterinary care by licensed professionals, and exercise and play in ways that are mentally and physically beneficial. The training they receive enriches their lives and enables them to participate in their own health care.

Many of our accredited facilities offer "swim with" and other interactive educational programs in which contact with the animals is involved. Interactive programs like these are at the heart of the work of modern zoos and aquariums because they facilitate a very special human-animal connection that leaves guests inspired, caring about the animals, and wanting to conserve them in the wild. These programs have operated safely and humanely for many years.

AMMPA-accredited facilities also must make available multiple levels of learning opportunities for the public on the marine mammals exhibited in their facilities, their ecosystem and wildlife conservation.

AMMPA member facilities are also required to conduct or support scientific research and/or conservation projects related to marine mammals. Marine mammals in the wild today are threatened at unprecedented levels from pollution, ship strikes, entanglement in fishing debris, novel diseases, and prey scarcity. The scientific research done by marine parks, aquariums and zoos on marine mammals in their care is needed now more than ever.

This resolution also advocates that facilities in Hawaii with cetaceans discontinue breeding them. Such an action would not be in the best interests of the cetaceans at these facilities, depriving

them of an important and natural part of their lives and denying them the enrichment of offspring. A halt to breeding would not be in keeping with the professional best practices of the accredited zoological community and would impede these facilities' ability to fulfill their obligations under Alliance Accreditation standards, which among other things require members to optimize genetic diversity and maintain a sufficient population to serve current and future conservation and education commitments. Successful breeding programs minimize the need to collect from the wild. As a result, no U.S. AMMPA-accredited facility has collected dolphins from the wild in decades.

H.R. 136 and H.C.R. 208 also call for a halt to the issuance of transport permits for cetaceans. However, the transport of animals is sometimes necessary for breeding loans and to ensure genetic diversity. When the transport of animals is needed, it is done in compliance with AMMPA standards and to ensure the animals and transport crew are transported in a safe and comfortable manner that meets the unique requirements of the aquatic or semi-aquatic species. Our members' transport safety record is exemplary. We have been the primary resource of scientific information to governments, regulatory agencies, CITES and IATA about the safe, humane transportation of marine mammals.

We respectfully urge you to vote no on H.R. 136 and H.C.R. 208, and to support the important public education efforts, scientific research, and rescue and rehabilitation work of marine parks, aquariums and zoos with cetaceans in Hawaii.

Thank you.

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