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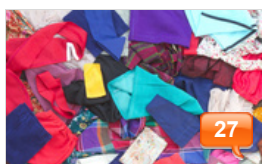
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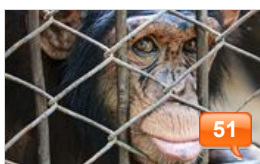
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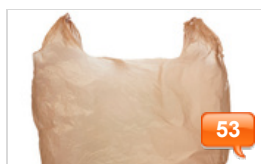
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# Another Aquarium Says No to Dolphin Shows

by [Alicia Graef](#) | September 4, 2014 | 8:30 am



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Animal advocates are welcoming an announcement from Florida's Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) that it will no longer have animal performances at a redesigned facility, and will instead focus on rescue and rehabilitation, but some experts are still questioning the aquarium's motives and whether what it's doing is really in the best interest of the animals it takes in.

A few years back CMA was featured in the movie "Dolphin Tale," which was inspired by the real-life rescue of Winter, a dolphin who was saved in 2005 after losing her tail when she was caught in a crab trap and

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was later fitted with a prosthetic one. She and another dolphin, Hope, will be featured in the sequel that will be released later this month.

After the movie was released, people went to see Winter in droves. She was a curiosity and an inspiration. According to the Tampa Tribune, after the movie was released, annual attendance skyrocketed from 250,000 to 750,000.

Sadly, marine mammal experts have pointed out that behind all the Hollywood glamour, Winter's life is pretty bleak and even though she could not be returned to the wild, the aquarium has been exploiting her as a draw instead of keeping her in an environment that would be more appropriate for her well-being.

"CMA could've done this the right way, with a seapen, and still made money," Gigi Glendinning, who runs the Philadelphia-based humane education group, 22 Reasons, told author David Kirby last year. "They underestimate the compassion of the general public to support their efforts without making Winter paint, swim with people, or listen to music."

Anti-captivity activists have also criticized CMA's latest plans to build a \$160 million facility with dolphin shows before downgrading to its latest plan – a \$68 million aquatic center that will instead focus on rescue, rehabilitation and release. The reduced cost is due in large part to ditching a planned dolphin stadium.

"We don't rescue them so we can have them to show to guests. Our goal is to release them back into the wild," CEO David Yates told the Tampa Tribune. "We're not about the big shows and stuff like that. The whole essence of this thing is no matter what animals we have or don't have, the experience of getting behind the scenes of our work, that's going to be the draw long-term."

However, in "A Dolphin Truth," a short documentary recently produced by Friends of Clearwater, a number of well-known experts including Ric O'Barry, Dr. Naomi Rose, Dr. Lori Marino, Dr. Maddalena Bearzi and former employees question whether CMA's real motive is rescue or revenue and they make a compelling case against how the CMA is going about its purported mission.

If the aquarium was serious about rehabilitation and release, they argue, it would be using sea pens away from the public and wouldn't be putting these animals on display. Even those who may never be able to return to the wild should not be kept as a draw for visitors and should be kept in enclosures as close to their natural environment as possible. They also note that there have been zero successful releases by CMA since a Dolphin Tale came out seven years ago.

Rescue, rehabilitation and release are unquestionably an honorable mission and vital to wild animals who need help, but what organizations do with these animals while they're in their care is something to think about before visiting, or donating to, any organization claiming to have the best interests of its animal residents at heart.

Still, the announcement that shows will no longer be part of its daily activities will hopefully be one among more to come from aquariums and marine parks around the world.

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