

Japan zoo group puzzled over dolphin hunt exclusion

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Bottlenose dolphins trapped in a cove by fishermen from the Japanese town of Taiji

The group representing Japan's zoos and aquariums said Thursday it was baffled by its exclusion from a global body over the way its members catch dolphins.

The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) last week

voted to suspend the Japanese chapter (JAZA) saying it had refused to stop taking dolphins caught in the controversial drive fishery in Taiji.

The town in southwestern Japan came to worldwide attention after the Oscar-winning documentary "The Cove" showed pods of the animals forced into a bay and then butchered with knives, in a mass-killing that turned the water red with blood.

Townfolk say the hunt is for dolphin meat, which they say is a traditional part of their diet.

But critics of the practice say there is insufficient demand to justify the slaughter of hundreds of animals a year and say the hunt is only profitable because of the high prices live dolphins can fetch when sold to aquariums and dolphin shows.

WAZA "requires all members to adhere to policies that prohibit participating in cruel and non-selective methods of taking animals from the wild," the organisation said last week, adding JAZA refused a proposed two-year moratorium on using the Taiji hunt.

Kensho Nagai, JAZA executive director, said: "We are puzzled at the WAZA announcement, because we've been discussing the issues and we've taken WAZA's advice" on improving the manner of capture.

"We annually take about 20 dolphins from Taiji, but we have improved how we hunt, separating our hunt from the everything else at Taiji that is for dolphin meat," he told AFP.



Games of Thrones actress Maisie Williams at a march in London on January 17, 2015 against the slaughter of dolphins in Taiji

"But we don't have control over the rest of dolphin catch, part of which is said to be sold by local brokers to aquariums in China and the Middle East," he added.

Nagai said WAZA had not so far been able to provide an internationally accepted scientific definition of cruelty—a key charge for opponents of the Taiji [hunt](#).

European members of WAZA do not keep dolphins, Nagai said, while US law bans the capture of wild cetaceans.

"We will discuss whether to stop receiving [dolphins](#) from Taiji at our general assembly next month," he said.

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