

Japanese zoos, aquariums vote over dolphin hunt

May 20 2015



Spectators watch as a dolphin takes part in a performance at Aqua Stadium aquarium in Tokyo on August 11, 2014

Japan's zoos and aquariums were expected to decide Wednesday whether to remain part of a global body that suspended them over their use of dolphins caught by the controversial drive hunt method.

Last month, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA)

voted to suspend its Japanese chapter (JAZA), saying it had refused to stop taking [dolphins](#) caught in Taiji in southern Japan.

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

Townfolk say the purpose of the [hunt](#) is to obtain 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 that 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, adding JAZA refused a proposed two-year moratorium on using the Taiji hunt.

Following the suspension, JAZA asked its 152 member zoos and aquariums to vote over whether to remain part of the world body, with the result expected later Wednesday.

"If we decide to remain a member of WAZA, that means we will stop taking dolphins caught with 'drive fishing' method," an official told AFP.

Earlier, JAZA executive director Kensho Nagai said: "We annually take about 20 dolphins from Taiji, but we have improved how we hunt, separating our hunt from everything else at Taiji that is for dolphin meat."

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

A weekend Japanese report said nearly half the dolphins in the country's aquariums are caught using the controversial fishing method, but it did not specify whether the dolphins came from Taiji.

Chief Cabinet Secretary and top government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said Wednesday the government "is aware" of the controversy between the WAZA and its Japanese chapter, and "the government will take measures to avoid any ramifications on exhibitions in aquariums."

The drive hunt "is a sustainable fishing [method] under appropriate control by...the government with scientific foundations, and is being carried out carefully so that dolphins are not hurt," Suga said.

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Citation: Japanese zoos, aquariums vote over dolphin hunt (2015, May 20) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-05-japanese-zoos-aquariums-vote-dolphin.html>

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