

Russia plans to free almost 100 captured whales

April 5 2019, by Vladimir Isachenkov



In this handout photo released by Whale Watching Russia on Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2019, Captured marine mammals in a holding facility in Srednyaya Bay, dubbed as 'whale prisons', near the port of Nakhodka, Russian Far East. Russian officials say that nearly 100 illegally captured whales could be returned to the wild during the summer. Russian Natural Resources Minister Dmitry Kobytkin says summer offers the most favorable conditions for release. (Whale Watching Russia via AP)

Russian officials have invited a French ocean explorer to offer advice on

how to safely release nearly 100 illegally captured whales, voicing hope that the animals could be let into the wild during summer.

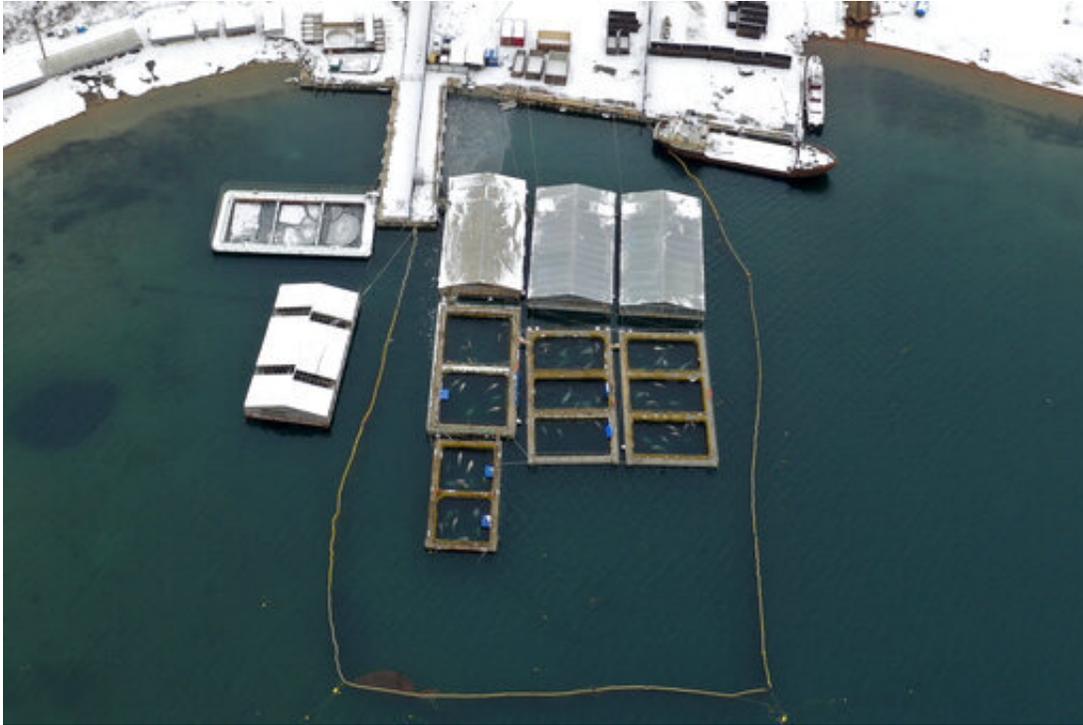
Jean-Michel Cousteau of the Ocean Futures Society arrived Friday in Russia's Far East on a mission to inspect the mammals and help create [conditions](#) for them to be released. Cousteau, son of famous oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, has voiced concern about the animals' condition and offered his help to the Russian government.

The [whales'](#) condition has drawn international concern, and President Vladimir Putin has ordered authorities to investigate the case and release the animals. Russian prosecutors have brought [criminal charges](#) against four companies keeping the whales.

Whales are worth a fortune on the black market, and local environmental activists suspected that they were captured for sale to amusement parks in China. Russian law only allows for the capture of whales for "scientific" purposes.

Regional Gov. Oleg Kozhemyako met with Cousteau in Vladivostok, voicing hope that his experience will help "get a full picture on how to allow the animals to readapt to living in the wild."

Before flying to the Far East, Cousteau met with Russian Natural Resources Minister Dmitry Kobylkin in Moscow on Thursday. Kobylkin said summer offers the most favorable conditions for releasing 97 belugas and orcas.



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"We couldn't release the animals in the winter, it would have simply killed them," Kobytkin said. "We can and must do this work in the coming summer."

He emphasized that Russia would like to rely on international expertise to ensure the safe release of the mammals.

"We want to do it as openly as possible," Kobytkin added.



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Russian scientists estimate that the rehabilitation effort will cost about 300 million rubles (about \$4.6 million).

Activists first raised the alarm late last fall when 101 belugas and orcas were captured and placed in a marine containment facility that environmentalists have dubbed a "whale prison" near the far eastern port of Nakhodka.

Local prosecutors have said that several of the mammals have escaped, but environmentalists said four [animals](#) likely died because of cramped conditions and low temperatures.



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In this video grab provided by the RU-RTR Russian television, Jean-Michel Cousteau of the Ocean Futures Society speaks to the media in Vladivostok, Russia, Thursday, April 4, 2019. Russian officials say that nearly 100 illegally captured whales could be returned to the wild during the summer. Cousteau of the Ocean Futures Society arrived Friday, April 5, 2019 in Russia's Far East on a mission to inspect the mammals and help create conditions for them to be released. Cousteau, son of famous oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, has voiced concern about the animals' condition and offered his help to the Russian government. (RU-RTR Russian Television/via AP)

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