

From: [Calleson, Teresa](#)
To: [Williams, Larry O](#); [Basili, Gianfranco D](#); [Mena, Lourdes](#); [Underwood, Chuck](#); [Herrington, Jay](#); [Brooks, Billy](#)
Subject: Re: manatees at MSQ
Date: Monday, September 27, 2021 8:00:26 AM
Attachments: [Dolphin deaths at Miami Seaquarium another black eye _Miami Herald.pdf](#)

Hi all,

With regard to the Miami Seaquarium (MSQ) situation, please let me know if anyone needs more information. I've provided multiple updates to supervisors on this situation since June and have been dealing with MSQ staff and U.S. Department of Agriculture, along with keeping Division of Management Authority informed. I've been contacted several times by Dr. Carolyn McKinnie with USDA with regard to the manatees at the facility. **Ex 5(b) & 7(c)**

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Ex 5(b) & 7(c)

A few relevant updates:

- Following concerns over manatee veterinary care, the difficult decision was made on June 22, 2021 to close MSQ to incoming manatee cases in coordination with the Division of Management Authority and USDA. All manatees in house were considered medically stable. I notified Andy Garrett, FWC's Rescue Coordinator, that no rescued manatees should be routed to MSQ pending the outcome of this investigation.
- MSQ has been closed to incoming cases since that time. In meetings with MSQ, the concern over appropriate veterinary care was discussed and they agreed to pursue a vet with manatee critical care experience. **Ex 5(b) & 7(c)**
Ex 5(b) & 7(c) The USFWS expressed concern, from the manatee welfare and permitting standpoint, and there were some follow up meetings.
- On August 19, 2021, Sea World and Miami Seaquarium entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for Sea World to assist their manatee rescue and rehabilitation partner, MSQ, with manatee veterinary care. Follow up calls occurred to discuss how the arrangement would work.
- When to resume manatee intakes was discussed, MSQ and SWF agreed that no manatees should be routed to MSQ until all of their current cases could be evaluated and relayed that to USFWS.
- On Friday, 9/24/2021, I received a call from Chris Plante at MSQ regarding the final USDA decision. I think the final report will be forthcoming.

- Due to an emergency call on Friday (9/24/2021) from Andy Garrett at FWC regarding a logistically difficult rescue his staff was conducting in Everglades National Park, I agreed (if MSQ was willing to accept the animal even for a 24-72hr hold) to have FWC route that animal to MSQ, best for the animal and the rescue/transport teams in terms of time on the road and stress on the animal who was badly injured from a watercraft collision (pneumothorax). Unfortunately, that manatee passed away from its injuries while being transported to the boat ramp in the Keys on the FWC rescue boat so MSQ has technically been offline as a critical care facility since June 2021.
- Currently, there are 15 manatees at Miami Seaquarium. Two of these manatees pre-date the Endangered Species Act so there are only 13 there right now under the purview of the USFWS. With the major space limitations across our MRP facilities and SWF now assisting with vet care, I think it's appropriate to leave these manatees in place for now since Sea World's vet team is providing oversight. Following Sea World's lead vet, (b)(6)(b)(6) recent trip to MSQ, she provided me with a positive update on the manatees there and the way things were proceeding. If the manatee areas seem ok, I think we need to get MSQ up and running for manatee intakes in the next month. They may have actually gotten the most UME manatee cases last winter/spring of any of the facilities so that space will be desperately needed this coming winter.

Let me know if you have questions or concerns. As this is now out in the news, I wanted to make sure our folks were aware.

Terri Calleson
Florida Manatee Recovery Lead
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, Florida 32256-7517
904-731-3286 (office)
Email: Teresa_Calleson@fws.gov
<http://www.fws.gov/northflorida>

From: Beatrice Balboa [Ex 6\(b\)Ex 6\(b\)](#) gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, September 26, 2021 11:18 AM

To: Williams, Larry O <larry_williams@fws.gov>; Basili, Gianfranco D <gianfranco_basili@fws.gov>; Kelso, LeeAnn <leeann_kelso@fws.gov>; Mena, Lourdes <Lourdes_Mena@fws.gov>; Underwood, Chuck <chuck_underwood@fws.gov>; Herrington, Jay <jay_herrington@fws.gov>; Dziergowski, Annie <annie_dziergowski@fws.gov>; Brooks, Billy <billy_brooks@fws.gov>; Calleson, Teresa <teresa_calleson@fws.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: manatees

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26 September 2021 1130 hours

To whom it may concern,

I am writing due to the overwhelming destruction of marine mammals species on all levels throughout the State of Florida.

I noted there are a number of promulgated rules and regulations regarding the destruction of wildlife and endangered species at the local, County, State of Florida and Federal jurisdictional levels in order to be fully compliant with the letter and the spirit of this most important matter.

United States/Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA)

Florida Endangered and Threatened Species Act of 1977 (FETSA)

Florida Coastal Zone Protection Act of 1985 (CZPA)

Florida Beach and Shore Preservation Act (BSPA)

XXXX

I look forward to a significant increase in preserving and ensuring that the State of Florida can take pride in their marine habitat and wildlife.



Sincerely

Beatrice Balboa

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USA

EDITORIALS

After five dolphins and a sea lion die, Seaquarium must be more accountable to the public | Editorial

BY THE MIAMI HERALD EDITORIAL BOARD
SEPTEMBER 25, 2021 3:42 PM

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06:38

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In its heyday, the Miami Seaquarium was one of the first marine-life parks in the country and the set for episodes of the popular 1960s TV show “Flipper.” It’s where Miamians went on school field trips and what helped put Miami on the map as a tourist destination.

But today, the Seaquarium’s outdated facilities sit on Virginia Key as the symbol of a bygone era. Marine animal shows, once seen as just another form of entertainment, raise the question of whether it’s still appropriate to breed marine animals for our amusement, especially after the 2013 documentary “Blackfish” reported the harsh treatment of killer whales at SeaWorld and other facilities.

The Miami Seaquarium has its own high-profile killer whale: Lolita, captured about 50 years ago, lives in the smallest orca tank in America and has been the subject of a [lawsuit](#), protests and a campaign by animal-welfare groups to retire her. To a layperson, Lolita’s pool looks painfully small, even if it complies with federal regulations, as the company and federal officials have said. The problem is, helping her isn’t as simple as moving her to a bigger space, many experts say.

TOP VIDEO

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The facility now has another public-relations issue: Between 2019 and 2020, [five bottlenose dolphins and one California sea lion died](#), the Herald reported. Two dolphins and the sea lion died from trauma to the head and neck and a third dolphin from drowning after getting caught in an underwater fence. The other two had an unexplained gas embolism and developmental abnormalities, respectively.

We didn’t know about these deaths, and probably would never have, had the Seaquarium’s biggest foe, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, not obtained and released [federal records](#). This “pattern of deaths” alarmed a scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who flagged it to regulators at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. After the deaths, a USDA veterinarian conducted an inspection on Sept. 3, 2020 and found no issues, records show.

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Public perceptions about marine mammals in captivity have changed since the Seaquarium opened in 1955. Canada's Parliament in 2019 [banned](#) whales, dolphins and porpoises from being bred or held in captivity. SeaWorld announced in 2015 it would [refocus its orca shows](#) on education and end its killer-whale breeding.

The Miami Seaquarium has withstood these controversies and the test of time, but as Miami becomes a more environmentally conscious community, how can the dated facility fit into that vision?

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

There's no simple answer.

PETA wants Lolita and all dolphins to be sent to seaside sanctuaries, but there's debate among scientists whether that would do more harm than good to the aging whale. Most experts told the Herald in 2017 that the stress of moving Lolita [could be catastrophic](#). Also, killing a business that has been so intertwined with the history of Miami is unrealistic, and these attractions, if done right, serve a purpose in educating the public about the perils facing marine mammals in the wild.

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But the least the Seaquarium can do is be more transparent.

To be clear, there's no indication the company engaged in wrongdoing. PETA says it's awaiting more records to find out whether a federal investigation was conducted. Still, it's unconscionable that these six deaths occurred in our back yard without public knowledge.

Transparency is a tough ask when we're talking about a private business. But Miami-Dade County government played a crucial role in helping the Seaquarium thrive. Since 1954, the county has leased land to the attraction and, in mid-October, the County Commission is expected to vote on whether to approve transferring the lease to new owners, the Dolphin Company.

This is the County Commission's chance to ask tough questions and demand more transparency. For example, county owned Zoo Miami lets the public know when it loses an animal. On Thursday, the zoo announced that [Kumang the orangutan had died](#) after being put under anesthesia to remove two teeth infecting her gum. She stopped breathing after she returned to her enclosure. In August, Zoo Miami shared that [a meerkat named Gizmo had died](#).

COUNTY OVERSIGHT

Public disclosure is “something we talked about,” Plante told the Herald Editorial Board, whose writer Isadora Rangel accepted an invitation for a tour of the facilities. But the Seaquarium has every incentive to keep that information from the public: It’s already a target of groups like PETA, and any information that gets released will surely cause a headache and more protests on Virginia Key.

The county already is pushing for changes. Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told the Board the Dolphin Company has a “long history” of conservation compared to the previous operators, Palace Entertainment, who are more focused on entertainment. The sale is expected to be finalized by the end of the year.

“I mean, for me, obviously, this has been a problematic site, and you know I’m very hopeful that this will be our pathway to creating something unique and wonderful, for Lolita especially,” Levine Cava told the Board. “She is the victim of another era. And you know the best that we can hope for is for her to have humane treatment and better conditions.”

She said the department of Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces and Zoo Miami Director William Elgar will have “an active role to oversee conditions at the facility.”

Elgar is a former director at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta and current president of the International Marine Animal Trainers’ Association. He told the Editorial Board some improvements under way include better seating in the stadium where Lolita lives and patching up her pool. The Seaquarium also is seeking accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the industry’s gold standard, according to Elgar. That multi-year process has required the attraction to invest \$2 million in habitat improvement, water quality and record keeping, General Manager Bill Lentz said. The Seaquarium is also building stronger fencing to avoid entanglement in the pool where the 18-year-old dolphin drowned.

WHO’S AT FAULT?

Plante said he suspects some of the dolphins who died might have had “underlying conditions,” but that didn’t come up in necropsies or the reports the Seaquarium sent to NOAA. When the Editorial Board asked him whether six deaths in a short span of time were just a sad coincidence, he said, “that could be it.”

Whether that’s actually the case depends on whom you ask.

PETA believes the “trauma-related deaths are clearly caused by the conditions of confinement at Seaquarium,” Jared Goodman, PETA Foundation’s vice president and deputy general counsel, [told the Herald](#) earlier this month. Goodman later told the Editorial Board that enforcement of federal regulations is lax, and aquariums are treated as “customers” instead of regulated entities.

Elgar, the Zoo Miami director, said aquariums and zoos usually go beyond the accreditation standards set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. He added Lolita is “one of the most well cared for whales in the world.”

Industry leaders and those who believe marine mammals don’t belong in tanks will forever disagree on what “care” means. But for as long as the Miami Seaquarium, both beloved and anachronistic, continues to operate, it must get its job right.

BEHIND OUR REPORTING

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