



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 16, 2019

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Statement

**Virgin Holidays' Pandering to Animal Rights Extremists Unfortunate;
Missed Opportunity to Support Work that Is Helping Animals in the Wild**

It's sad and unfortunate to see Virgin Holidays use its brand and resources to attack world-class, accredited aquariums and marine parks and undermine their work to educate people about marine mammals, study them, and conserve them in the wild. The company could have made a real difference for whale and dolphin conservation by supporting that work and spearheading new efforts to help imperiled animals in the wild but instead chose to try to appease animal rights extremists by severing its long-standing partnerships with zoological facilities that display cetaceans and supporting the creation of ill-conceived, activist-run "sea sanctuaries."

Just a few years ago, after visiting marine parks to learn about their work and standards, Virgin Holidays assured the leaders of the aquariums and marine parks it partners with that it understands the education, conservation and research benefits of having whales and dolphins on public display. The London-based travel company even went so far as to reveal that their own polling showed Virgin Holidays' customers overwhelmingly expressed a strong desire to experience marine mammal interactions at their facilities. Now, on the receiving end of pressure campaigns from PETA and similar groups making allegations not supported by science, Virgin Holidays has changed its mind and flip-flopped on its position, despite the lack of scientific support for activist allegations about marine mammals in zoological facilities. Or it was disingenuous with its partners from the beginning about its ultimate intent.

The accredited zoological facilities Virgin Holidays sells tickets to are among the best and most experienced in the world at what they do. For decades, the scientific, behavioral, and veterinary experts at these facilities have worked hard to enhance animal welfare, and as a result, animals in human care are thriving. It is ironic that a travel agency and its affiliated extremist organizations with no zoological expertise are attempting to tell the real experts how to "evolve" their product offerings, care for their animals, and improve their standards.

Whales and dolphins at high-quality, accredited facilities live long and healthy lives. Recent published studies show dolphins and whales in these facilities [live as long as or longer](#) than their counterparts in the wild. They receive high-quality food, veterinary care, exercise, and behavioral enrichment, and their survival, health, and stress levels are the same as or better than their counterparts in the wild.

An international organization dedicated to conservation through public display, education, and research.



Contrary to the allegations of pressure groups campaigning for “sea sanctuaries,” there are no scientific studies suggesting that dolphins in marine mammal facilities are more prone to disease than dolphins in the wild. Instead, recent studies have shown that the immune systems of wild dolphins are much *more* challenged than the immune systems of dolphins in human care. There also are no scientific studies suggesting that dolphins in marine mammal facilities are any more stressed than dolphins in the wild. To the contrary, studies have shown that cortisol levels (i.e., the "stress hormone") of dolphins in marine mammal facilities are either very similar to, or lower than, cortisol levels of wild dolphins, depending on the sampling technique.

Currently across the territorial waters of the U.S., from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico and all along the Pacific coastline, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Services has issued a series of Unusual Mortality Events for several species of marine mammals. With marine mammals in the wild facing unprecedented threats from prey scarcity, ship strikes, natural and manmade toxins, entanglement in fishing gear and other marine debris, zoos and aquariums are doing their part to study these threats and find ways to combat them. They are also working to rescue and rehabilitate thousands of sick and injured animals in the wild each year. If Virgin Holidays can't help with this work, it should at least not impede it.

We appreciate all of our travel partners that value and understand the critical importance of the scientific research, public education, and conservation work done in zoos and aquariums, and we will continue to work with them in good faith.

The Alliance is the preeminent trade association and accrediting body for zoos, aquariums, and marine parks throughout the world that exhibit marine mammals. Our mission is to support the highest standards of care for marine mammals and to contribute to their conservation in the wild through public education, scientific research, and the rescue and rehabilitation of sick and injured animals in the wild. Its accredited institutions in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean collectively possess the largest body of marine mammal experience and expertise in the world.