



## Whale Sanctuary Project Secures New Funding Commitments as France Continues Review of Options for Wikie and Keijo

New funding strengthens construction momentum as global demand for whale sanctuary solutions grows

**PORT HILFORD BAY, NS (April 8, 2026)** — As pre-construction and mobilization continue at the Whale Sanctuary Project’s Nova Scotia site, the organization is pleased to announce significant additional donor contributions, including a US \$3 million donation. This latest funding provides additional funds for initial construction and adds momentum to the capital fundraising campaign to complete the sanctuary.

The funding will be deployed to support near-term construction activities and the development of key facilities as the sanctuary prepares to receive its first whales.

“This level of support is a clear signal that there is both urgency and belief in building a viable alternative to captivity in marine entertainment parks and aquariums,” **said Charles Vinick, Chief Executive Officer of the Whale Sanctuary Project.** “These funds allow us to move forward on critical infrastructure while ensuring we are building the sanctuary to the highest standards of care.”

*Awaiting word from France*

The announcement comes as the Whale Sanctuary Project continues to await clarity from the Government of France on next steps regarding the future of the two mother-and son orcas Wikie and Keijo and the 12 bottlenose dolphins who are being considered for relocation to a habitat at the Beauval Zoo in France.

While no final determination for all 14 cetaceans has been communicated, the Whale Sanctuary Project remains prepared to support responsible outcomes.

“We stand ready to work in partnership with governments to support a safe and successful transition for whales like Wikie and Keijo,” **added Vinick.** “This is about aligning policy decisions with credible, welfare-first solutions.”

The French Ministry of Ecological Transition has previously identified the Whale Sanctuary Project as the most credible, ethical and welfare-focused option that meets French legal requirements. The Whale Sanctuary Project continues to prioritize animal welfare, scientific rigor, and long-term care outcomes for all cetaceans who can be retired from entertainment facilities.



“As a new ethic of respect and compassion takes hold, a new model is being created in how to care for animals of all kinds who have spent their whole lives in the small and impoverished environment of a concrete tank,” **said Dr. Lori Marino, Founder and President of the Whale Sanctuary Project.**

Successful transfer of any marine mammals to sanctuary requires careful collaboration among the Whale Sanctuary Project and the present management and care teams. This begins with a thorough health assessment by independent veterinary experts and continues with the whales being conditioned for life in an ocean environment. The organization looks forward to collaborating with the Government of France and Marineland Antibes to support the welfare of Wikie and Keijo.

*Building a global pathway for whales transitioning out of captivity*

Completion of the Nova Scotia sanctuary will signal the beginning of a new model for captive cetaceans around the world, as the need for sanctuaries grows more urgent. The Whale Sanctuary Project is closely monitoring developments related to the beluga whales at Marineland Canada, which has also closed to the public and whose 30 surviving beluga whales are in urgent need of care and new homes.

“Public opinion in Europe and the Americas no longer supports the exploitation of whales and dolphins,” **concluded Vinick.** “We need to develop fully engaged partnerships among governments, organizations, and the marine entertainment industry for whales and dolphins to be retired to more natural environments. Our role is to provide a credible, welfare-first pathway that makes these transitions possible.”

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About the Whale Sanctuary Project

The Whale Sanctuary Project is establishing a coastal sanctuary in Nova Scotia, Canada, to provide retired captive orcas and beluga whales with a safe, natural environment for lifelong care. The organization is building the infrastructure needed to support humane, legally compliant transitions out of captivity in aquariums and entertainment parks.

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