



Whale Sanctuary Project Offers Help in Providing Sanctuary Solution for Marineland Orcas

Stresses that while a coastal sanctuary in Greece or elsewhere in Mediterranean may be a solution for dolphins, it is not a solution for orcas.

February 16th, 2025

The Whale Sanctuary Project (WSP) responded today to the announcement by Minister Agnès Pannier-Runacher that she wants to create a sanctuary in collaboration with Italy, Spain and Greece as a possible solution to the plight of the orcas Wikie and Keijo at Marineland Antibes.

Given the Minister's interest in a sanctuary solution, we are requesting a meeting with the Minister to realistically examine all sanctuary options for Wikie and Keijo.

Marineland is looking to relocate dolphins as well as orcas, and the WSP, whose team members have experience in relocating and rehabilitating both whales and dolphins, has offered its assistance to whatever sanctuary solution may be adopted by the French government.

However, while the dolphins at Marineland could be retired to a sanctuary in the Mediterranean, the WSP emphasizes that there is no sanctuary solution in southern Europe for orcas.

“The possibility of building a sanctuary for them in the Mediterranean is probably the worst of the possible options,” said Dr. David Perpiñán, who specializes in exotic, zoo and wildlife medicine and is a diplomate of the European College of Zoological Medicine (Dr. Perpiñán is also the veterinary consultant for One Voice France in their lawsuit against Marineland). “The Mediterranean is too hot for these animals and that’s why orcas are so uncommon in Italy and Greece. Wikie and Keijo's origin is Iceland. These two orcas do not belong to the ecotypes seen in the Mediterranean.”

Neither do they belong at Loro Parque zoo in the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa, where four orcas have died in the last three years.

“Transferring Wikie and Keijo to another small concrete pool, where Wikie will be bred in an attempt to replenish the zoo’s stock, violates the entire spirit and purpose of the

government's 2021 ruling that brings an end to keeping whales and dolphins captive as a form of entertainment," said Dr. Lori Marino, President of the WSP. Dr. Marino has studied the brains of whales and dolphins for more than 30 years. "Orcas are among the most intelligent and emotionally sensitive animals in the world," she added

The only sanctuary solution that will be able to meet the needs of the orcas is the 40-hectare (100-acre) site that the WSP is developing in Nova Scotia.

"We have completed the required three years of environmental studies and sanctuary design work," said Charles Vinick, Executive Director. "We are ready to begin construction."

The remaining roadblock for Wikie and Keijo to come to Nova Scotia is financial. "Now is the moment for a collaboration of all parties to provide a sanctuary solution for Wikie and Keijo," Vinick said.

The option currently being proposed for an orca sanctuary in Europe is on the Aegean island of Lipsi, where the Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation is constructing a Rehabilitation Centre for Marine Species. The Institute is also planning to become a sanctuary for former captive dolphins. And while the orcas at Marineland are not suited to the warm waters of the Mediterranean, a dolphin sanctuary at Lipsi could be a viable option.

The lives of Wikie and Keijo are too important for us all to miss this opportunity to do what is right for them.

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