

Windhoek, 10 October 2016

STATEMENT

on the capture of rare and endangered marine animals for the aquarium trade

The Namibian Chamber of Environment firmly supports the environmental clauses in the Namibian Constitution, including the sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future. However, the Chamber is opposed to the capture of rare and endangered marine animals for the Asian (and any other) aquarium trade for the following reasons:

- 1. Conservation:** a number of the species in question are uncommon, rare, seriously declining in numbers or comprising small isolated populations in Namibian waters. Every effort should be taken to protect and conserve these animals (e.g. whales, dolphins, penguins), and there should be a totally closed-door policy to any exploitation of these species other than through carefully managed tourism. Many of these species are endangered, both locally and internationally and are on the IUCN Red Data list.
- 2. Sustainable use:** removing animals from small, isolated, endangered and/or declining populations, particularly breeding individuals, does not constitute sustainable use. Such removal will disrupt social structures, result in reduced breeding and may impact on group hunting efficiency. The principle of sustainable use, which works so well in the wildlife sector in Namibia, is linked to land owners and custodians having long-term rights as well as long-term incentives and responsibilities within a regulated system. External pillaging of renewable resources carries no responsibility for the long-term health of those populations. The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, as the responsible custodian on behalf of the Namibian nation, must ensure that this sort of senseless removal of valuable resources does not occur and is never again considered.
- 3. Misrepresentation:** we understand that the proponent has argued that these species occur in “excess numbers” and that they are a cause of dwindling fish stocks. People familiar with Namibia’s coastal and marine ecosystem are perfectly aware that whales, dolphins and penguins are uncommon, rare, declining, threatened, and have an insignificant impact on fish stocks in Namibian waters in terms of competition with the fishing sector. Indeed, the opposite situation applies, with these marine species suffering from the decline caused by over-fishing, particularly before Namibia obtained control of its marine zone after independence, and particularly resulting from the collapse of the sardine and pilchard fisheries. The proponent is simply using populist misrepresentation and untruths to support an indefensible proposal. Indeed, the Namibian Chamber of Environment would like to see a total closure of the pilchard fisheries for enough years for this resource to recover to levels where it would once again be a viable industry, and a viable food resource for marine birds and mammals.

4. **Ethics:** wild, wide-ranging species are generally unsuited for captivity. Animals suffer high levels of stress and high rates of mortality in captivity. It is widely considered to be unethical and morally questionable to remove such species from the wild and place them in captivity.

5. **Reputational damage:** Namibia has an excellent international reputation in the fields of conservation, sustainable natural resource management and sustainable development. This reputation would be seriously tarnished if approval for the capture of these species were to be given by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources.

6. **Local beneficiation:** no long-term benefits would accrue to Namibia and the Namibian people from allowing such a capture of endangered and CITES-listed marine wildlife in Namibia. These species play a far more important role within Namibia's marine ecosystem and within the Namibian economy. Indeed, the reputational damage that this would do to Namibia would have a negative impact on Namibia's tourism industry. Tourism is one of the main pillars of our country's economy and, in the current difficult climatic and economic circumstances, the fastest growing sector of the economy. We should not be doing anything that would negatively impact its future growth.

In conclusion, our view on the application to the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources revolves around the issues of wise and ethical use of renewable resources, benefits from natural resources to Namibia and her people, conservation of rare and threatened species, and potential reputational and economic damage to Namibia. This application does not promote or contribute to sustainable use of natural resources but rather undermines these principles. The idea behind the application resembles more an uninformed attempt to pillage valuable resources from Namibia's waters with absolutely no concern for the implications and consequences. The animals in question are far better left in their natural habitat and protected for the important ecological roles they play in our coastal and marine ecosystems and for their tourism value.

We are confident that, after due consideration, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources will arrive at the same conclusion.

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