



# Animal Welfare Institute

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February 1, 2019

Dr. Barbara Kohn  
Senior Staff Veterinarian  
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Dear Dr. Kohn:

We are writing as a matter of urgency to request that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) conduct an immediate inspection of Dolphinaris in Arizona, in order to review the animals' clinical records and necropsy reports, after the fourth dolphin death there in less than two years (Walker and Frigerio, 2019). Bodie died in Sept 2017; Alia in May 2018; Khloe in December 2018; and now Kai'nalū on January 31, 2019. For the first three animals, AWI and Animal Defense League of Arizona wrote to APHIS (and initially to Dolphinaris itself) requesting the animals' necropsy reports, via FOIA and a direct request, but were told that APHIS had not retained any of these records. With this fourth death, it is imperative that an investigation into the conditions at Dolphinaris and a full health assessment of the remaining dolphins be conducted by a team that includes an expert APHIS veterinarian and an expert NGO veterinarian, as well as other external specialists with whom Dolphinaris is working.

Our concern relates particularly to the risk posed by valley fever—caused by the fungus *Coccidioides*—which is prevalent in Arizona, and by other aerosolized pathogens and particulates that are part of a desert environment. We submitted a FOIA request to APHIS for Bodie's necropsy report when Dolphinaris reported to APHIS that Bodie's cause of death was a fungal infection, but the facility's public claim was that he had a "rare muscle disease" (letter from AWI to APHIS FOIA office, dated January 5, 2018). With each subsequent death, the onus has shifted more firmly to Dolphinaris—and, indeed, to APHIS—to demonstrate that airborne fungal or other pathogens or deficiencies in Dolphinaris' life support systems do not pose a risk to the surviving dolphins and/or that no other inherent characteristic of Dolphinaris and its location is a threat to the animals.

In fact, we strongly urge that the remaining four dolphins at Dolphinaris be confiscated and returned to their facilities of origin. Regardless, an independent investigation into what is happening there is imperative at this point. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Naomi A. Rose, Ph.D.  
Marine mammal scientist

CC: Peter Thomas, Ph.D., executive director, Marine Mammal Commission

Reference:

Walker, M. and Frigerio, J. (2019). Fourth dolphin dies at Dolphinaris Arizona in less than two years. *ABC15*, 31 January 2019, available at <https://www.abc15.com/news/region-northeast-valley/scottsdale/fourth-dolphin-dies-at-dolphinaris-arizona-in-less-than-two-years>