

**Animal Welfare Institute * Kimmela Center for Animal Advocacy * Earth Island Institute
* Cetacean Society International * Orca Network * Orca Conservancy * OrcaLab/Pacific
Orca Society * In Defense of Animals * Animal Legal Defense Fund * Born Free USA *
World Animal Protection**

RE: Support the ORCA Act (H.R. 4019)

February 9, 2016

The Honorable _____
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Congressman _____:

On behalf of our members and supporters nationwide, we are writing to express our strong support for the Orca Responsibility and Care Advancement (ORCA) Act (H.R. 4019), sponsored by Congressman Adam Schiff, to prohibit the taking, import and export of orcas for the purpose of public display.

Since the adult male orca Tilikum killed his trainer, Dawn Brancheau, at SeaWorld Orlando in February 2010, there has been a growing realization among the American public (and globally) that orcas do not belong in captivity. They are too large, too socially and behaviorally complex, too intelligent, and too wide-ranging for their welfare needs to be met in oceanariums. The media attention after Ms. Brancheau's tragic death was intense; within two years a book, *Death at SeaWorld: Shamu and the Dark Side of Killer Whales in Captivity* by David Kirby, had been published and then one year later the documentary *Blackfish*, directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite, was released. When this film aired on CNN in October 2013, the reaction of the millions of people who viewed it was so profound and wide-spread that its impacts have been dubbed the "*Blackfish* Effect." This phenomenon has caused SeaWorld's attendance and stock prices to plummet.

For decades the public display of this species was accepted and even praised by the general public, policy-makers, and even many scientists, for its role in transforming the image of this top predator of the oceans from mindless killer to intelligent, family-oriented mammal. However, a growing body of research now points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that orcas cannot cope with the restrictions placed on them in captive enclosures. Prominent cetacean biologists recently expressed support for phasing out the public display of this species. A sampling of the problems facing captive orcas includes: damaged teeth, which can lead to systemic and significant health issues; lack of exercise, symbolized by the collapsed dorsal fin seen in 100% of captive male orcas; inbreeding; unnatural levels of aggression; and shortened life spans. SeaWorld San Antonio recently lost one of its female orcas, who was only 18 years old. Female orcas in the wild have a mean life expectancy of 50 years and rarely die during their reproductive years.

Several U.S. state and municipal jurisdictions have attempted to end the public display of orcas and/or other cetaceans, with only some succeeding to date (e.g., New York, South Carolina,

Maui County). The California Coastal Commission recently issued a permit to SeaWorld San Diego to expand its Shamu Stadium complex but only if the orca breeding program ended; SeaWorld is now challenging this decision in court. Establishing a federal mandate will cut through this confusing patchwork and clarify once and for all that this magnificent species does not belong in captivity.

The ORCA Act (H.R. 4019) reflects the desire of an increasing segment of the American public to phase out the public display of orcas. We urge you to support this landmark bill.

Sincerely,

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