

July 17, 2003

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Dear Sirs:

On behalf of the more than seven million worldwide members and constituents of The Humane Society of the United States and its international arm, Humane Society International (HSUS/HSI), we are writing to express our grave concern regarding the news of the recent capture of at least 60 wild dolphins in the Solomon Islands.

Such a massive capture of dolphins is unprecedented and will inevitably lead to debilitated and dying animals. Many wild-caught dolphins suffer stress and refuse to eat in the weeks following capture; with so many animals to monitor, it will be

difficult if not impossible to ensure all receive adequate care. We understand that the animals are being kept in appalling conditions without appropriate space, and that at least one has already died (after being attacked by a crocodile). We fear that more will die if they continue to be kept in these conditions much longer.

In addition to the obvious animal welfare issues, this is also a clear example of foreign entrepreneurs taking advantage of a political and economic crisis in a small island nation to exploit its natural resources. It is unlikely that the captures proceeded with appropriate environmental assessments or management oversight. These removals, if not undone, may permanently harm the nearshore marine environment of the Solomons. Top predators such as dolphins play a vital role in marine ecosystems – the numbers captured in this instance may very well represent the majority of the local dolphin stock.

In addition, while the Solomon Islands is not a party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), at least one country that has contracted to import some of these animals (Mexico) is a party and therefore the Solomons would need to meet CITES export criteria for Appendix II animals. One of these criteria is to make a finding of no detriment to the population – clearly, it would be impossible to find the capture of 60 dolphins (and perhaps more) from one population, with little regard for age or gender selection, to be non-detrimental to the population. If such a finding was made, it was clearly without a scientific basis and cannot be accepted as valid by any receiving country that is a party to CITES.

We urge you to take action, in your various capacities, to prevent the capture of any more wild dolphins in the Solomon Islands and to immediately return those that have been captured back to their original habitat. Time is of the essence – the longer these animals remain in confinement, the greater their odds of dying before they can be released (or, for that matter, transported). Foreign interests should not be allowed to exploit the precious natural resources of the Solomon Islands during this period of political unrest.

We await your positive response to this issue, which is clearly attracting growing concern worldwide.

Sincerely,

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Wildlife and Habitat Protection

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Cc: Victor Lichtinger, Secretario, Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, México