

National Aquarium building protected ocean home for retired dolphins

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

06.22.16

MIAMI, Fla. — Eight dolphins will soon be retired from the National Aquarium in Baltimore, Maryland. After a life in tanks, they will be moved to a protected ocean home.

No other aquarium has done this before. Aquarium staff plan to move the dolphins to a safe seaside space by the end of 2020. Many groups that help animals were happy about the news.

"There's no model anywhere, that we're aware of, for this," John Racanelli told The Associated Press. He is in charge of the National Aquarium. Racanelli said he knows that the new plan will be difficult and more expensive, but he thinks it is important.

Their Own Space In The Ocean

The aquarium's Atlantic bottlenose dolphins will not simply be released into open seas. They will be given their own closed-off space in the ocean. The size of the space has not been released, but Racanelli said it will be measured in acres, not square feet – meaning it will be quite large.

The Florida Keys and the Caribbean are being considered as possible locations.

The "sea pen" will have full-time workers and high-quality water. The dolphins will also have separate, smaller pools for getting treatment from vets or hiding from dangerous weather. Fences will keep them from mingling with wild dolphins.

Only the oldest dolphin in the group has ever swum in ocean water. She is a female captured in 1972. Six of the other dolphins were born at the aquarium and one was born at SeaWorld in Orlando.

Ranging in age from 7 to 44, they stopped performing scheduled shows in 2012. They still live in 25-year-old tanks.

Keeping The Animals Happy And Healthy

Rancanelli said that the aquarium staff has learned how to take better care of the dolphins over the years. They think that bringing the dolphins to the ocean will help them be even healthier.

Many other places are changing the way they care for animals. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus retired their elephants early, moving them to a nature refuge in Florida. SeaWorld recently stopped breeding orcas, the animal they are known for. These places made their decisions after facing increasing concern about the treatment of their animals.

Disagreement Over What Is Best For The Animals

Three animal advocacy groups plan to make a safe seaside space. They plan to have orcas, beluga whales and dolphins live there. Before the Baltimore aquarium announced their plan, many people who took care of

dolphins were against the idea. They argued that sea pens can actually harm the animals.

The National Aquarium is a member of a larger group called the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The aquarium will also work with the government as it moves the dolphins.

Humane Society CEO Wayne Pacelle approves of Racanelli's plans. He says they show how places are more focused on the animals' well-being.

SeaWorld will not be releasing any of their animals. They believe their animals are safest in their current tanks. Sea pens, the company said, would be dangerous for their animals. The company also argued that they help teach visitors about protecting wildlife.

The National Aquarium's dolphins will still be cared for by humans in their new home. Racanelli said they will be cared for for the rest of their lives.

A Price For The Sea Pen

It is not certain yet how much the new sea pens will cost. It depends on the price of the land. But taking care of the dolphins in sea pens should be less expensive. Ocean water does not need to be controlled like aquarium water does. Racanelli is not sure if scientists or other guests will be able to visit.

The aquarium has faced some difficulties with money. Things were especially bad when two baby dolphins died in 2011. Then a new dolphin program was created and the aquarium started charging more for tickets. They began making more money, though not as much this year.

QUIZ

1. Read the section "A Price For The Sea Pen." Which option is MOST likely true based on this section?

A

The aquarium will need to spend a lot of money on special water for the sea pens.

B

The aquarium will ask scientists to help pay the cost of the new sea pens.

C

The aquarium needs to save money and hopes that the sea pens will not be expensive.

D

The aquarium will sell more tickets once the dolphins are moved to sea pens.

2. Which sentence from the section "Keeping The Animals Happy And Healthy" explains why many animal shows are making changes?

A

Rancanelli said that the aquarium staff has learned how to take better care of the dolphins over the years.

B

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus retired their elephants early, moving them to a nature refuge in Florida.

C

SeaWorld recently stopped breeding orcas, the animal they are known for.

D

These places made their decisions after facing increasing concern about the treatment of their animals.

3. Which detail BEST reflects the main goal of the National Aquarium?

A

The aquarium knows it will be expensive, but also thinks that it is important.

B

The aquarium plans to give the dolphins a very large space and high-quality care.

C

The aquarium wants to influence other places to release their animals as well.

D

The aquarium wants to create a new dolphin program that charges more for tickets.

4. Which of the following are two main ideas from the article?

A

Many people now believe releasing animals will make them healthier; SeaWorld recently stopped breeding orcas.

B

SeaWorld recently stopped breeding aquatic animals; many people believe that moving the dolphins will keep them healthier.

C

The National Aquarium is moving eight dolphins to an ocean pen; the dolphins mainly grew up in captivity in the aquarium.

D

Many people believe releasing animals like dolphins will keep them healthier; the National Aquarium is moving eight dolphins to an ocean pen.

ANSWER KEY

1) A

2) D

3) B

4) D