

# EAZA Marine Mammal Demonstration and Public Interaction Guidelines



Approved by EEP Committee 29 March 2019

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This document presents the guidelines of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) for the use of marine mammals (Cetaceans, Pinnipeds and Sirenia) in demonstrations. This document is supplementary to the *EAZA Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria (2019)*. EAZA fully supports the evolution of zoos and aquaria toward becoming community-based centres of conservation, education and research. EAZA Members have a responsibility to themselves and their peers to conduct the husbandry of animals according to these principles.

The role and public perception of zoos and aquaria is changing rapidly in response to:

- the limited connection of the public with the natural world
- the ongoing and universal degradation of wild habitats and the need to conserve taxa that are under threat of extinction in the wild
- the influence of zoos and aquaria on the environmental consciousness of visitors and members of their local communities, and the associated responsibility to use this influence to instil responsible behaviours towards nature and animals
- the need to increase our knowledge on the general biology, behaviour and animals needs of Marine Mammals. Zoos and Aquaria are important centres for research and are encouraged to communicate their findings to the public.
- the involvement of modern zoos and aquaria in promotion of global conservation strategies and research programmes.

EAZA recognises the important role marine mammal demonstrations can serve in our mission to educate, inspire and connect our visitors with nature. They are an opportunity for direct learning, with an engaged audience to encourage behavioural change, engender fascination with the oceans, and inform about the impact human activities have on the planet.

With the aim of maximising these positive impacts, this document intends to provide EAZA members with guidance for the development of marine mammal demonstrations and the performance of animals in these demonstrations, as well as providing guidance around visitor/animal interactions. This document does not intend to provide guidance on husbandry, housing and management, which are explored in other documents such as

EAZA Best Practice Guidelines (BPGs) and the Standards and Guidelines of the European Association for Aquatic Mammals (EAAM).

This document is not intended to limit the ability of our members to create marine mammal demonstrations but intends to provide guidance and support for demonstrations that exhibit EAZA's mission of conservation, research, education and modern practice. EAZA members are also required to follow specific local and national legislation guiding these activities.

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## 1. Definitions

- 1.1 Demonstrations** are defined as any case where an animal is demonstrating behaviours, under the supervision of a trainer in the view of visitors, with the intention of educating, inspiring, and entertaining our visitors. This would also include visitor interactions and experiences.
- 1.2 Training** is defined as applied use of operant and/or classical conditioning method to selectively shape an animal's behaviour to aid in health management, husbandry, public display, applied conservation, research, and safety. Benefits of training include, but are not limited, to: promoting husbandry, improving veterinary care, mental stimulation, giving an opportunity for choice, development of a trusting relationship between animal and trainer, learning opportunities, encouraging social interaction and cohesion and variability in a controlled environment.
- 1.3 Trainer** is defined as an experienced staff member with specific marine mammal biology knowledge and husbandry, behaviour and training knowledge and experience.
- 1.4 Educator** is defined as a staff member or volunteer that provides inspiring conservation educational messaging during the demonstration.
- 1.5 Visitor** is a member of the public observing or participating in a demonstration, interaction programme or special event.
- 1.6 Visitor/Animal interactions programmes** are defined as any programme with the express intention of bringing visitors into contact between human and animal under behavioural control and with the guidance of a trainer. This includes but is not limited to feeding opportunities, touch pools, contact programmes, and photo opportunities. This also includes volunteers during demonstrations and backstage/VIP tours.
- 1.6.1 In water programmes** are defined as any programme when a visitor enters the water with an animal under behavioural control and with the guidance of a trainer. This includes shallow water (platform or sunken dock) interactions as well as deep water.

**1.7 Props** are any external device used during the demonstration. These may be targets, toys, set pieces, ropes for jump height, etc.

**1.8 Anthropomorphism** is the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities.

## **2. Guidelines for Demonstrations**

### **2.1 Exhibit**

2.1.1 The exhibit and facility must meet EAZAs Standards for the Accommodation and Care of Animals in Zoos and Aquaria (2019, hereafter referred to as the EAZA Standards) and should follow guidelines for species specific enclosures as laid down in EAZA Best Practice Guidelines. These standards and guidance for exhibit design, housing and management are therefore not part of these demonstration guidelines.

2.1.2 Animals must be provided with choice in pools, and the ability to not participate in the demonstration.

2.1.3 Animals should be maintained under natural lighting conditions and photo period.

2.1.4 Species specific guidelines for exhibits and photo period will be outlined in the EAZA best practice guidelines.

### **2.2 Sound effects and Music**

2.2.1 Members should minimize the exposure of animals and visitor to sound that may cause auditory discomfort or distress during the demonstration. Monitoring of acoustic levels (both above and below the water surface) should be done on a regular basis, and especially when changing demonstration soundtracks, changing of speaker or microphone equipment, or use of mechanical props.

2.2.2 Sound and music should be limited to above ground speakers, with volume at the lowest reasonable level to allow visitors to clearly hear the messaging. Music and sound production should be limited to demonstrations or specific training/research sessions. Location, direction, and volume of speakers should be considered for providing maximum comfort for the animals and visitors. Members should follow local legislation on sound limitations and dB requirements.

2.2.3 Concerns about sound pollution related to pumps, waves, and spray should be considered and monitored for possible negative effects when adding to demonstrations.

- 2.2.4 Special lighting or environmental effects, such as lasers during a night demonstration or fog effects should not hinder or harm the animals participating in the demonstration.
- 2.2.5 Species specific sound ranges and limitations will be outlined in the EAZA best practice guidelines.

### **2.3 Accessories, Props, Etc.**

- 2.3.1 Behaviours involving props during the demonstration should be explained. (e.g. a rope pulled to a height for targeting or jumping over demonstrates the animals visual and physical dexterity to assist the visitors understanding of the animal's natural capabilities.) The preference is for props that may be encountered in the animals' natural environment. While animals may interact with all manner of enrichment devices, trainers should be aware of inadvertent messaging that may be received by visitors.
- 2.3.2 Props and enrichment items must be evaluated for human and animal safety prior to being used.
- 2.3.3 Trainers are free to interact with all props as part of the demonstration.
- 2.3.4 Using animals to advertise products or services is considered disrespectful to the intrinsic value of the animals. Branded props, such as an animal putting recycling into a branded trash can are strongly discouraged.

## **3. Variability of Demonstrations**

- 3.1 Demonstrations should be changeable, variable and creative to keep animals fit and engaged by providing mental and physical stimulation. Variability in behaviour selection, reward, animal choice, and social context can and should be considered a major part of psychological and physiological enrichment.

## **4. Animal Selection**

- 4.1 EAZA Ex situ Programme (EEP) (non)-breeding and transfer recommendations must be followed as in accordance with the EAZA Population Management Manual (2019). EEP participants can and should weigh into the process of developing these recommendations, however, decisions based on "popularity" or level of training for demonstrations cannot be a reason to deny the transfer of an animal to another facility.
- 4.2 Animals are expected to be maintained in a compatible social environment in agreement with the EAZA Ex situ Programme (EEP) recommendations to meet the psychological and physical needs of the animals. Animals may be separated from the normal social environment for demonstration, training and husbandry

purposes. EAZA best practice guidelines will outline species specific recommendations on social separation

**4.3** Animals participating in the training programme for demonstrations must be in good condition. Pregnant females and any animal diagnosed with a medical problem or under treatment must be approved by a veterinarian for continued or modified participation in demonstrations.

**4.4** EAZA does not support the use of rearing techniques for demonstrations that directly affect the welfare and health of the animal such as:

4.4.1 The premature removal of an animal from the mother for specific use in a demonstration that negatively impacts the dyad and social bonding.

4.4.2 Any techniques that would negatively affect the EAZA Ex situ Programmes (EEPs and ESBs).

## **5. Welfare Monitoring**

**5.1** EAZA requires the consistent use of state-of-the-art welfare monitoring tools according to current, available standards for all animals.

## **6. Behavioural Selection and Feeding Techniques**

**6.1** Animals are to be exhibited as animals and not as humans. Acting and anthropomorphic behaviours are highly discouraged and EAZA members should refrain from demonstrating such behaviours. This would include responding to questions, waving hello/good bye with pectoral flipper or tail, playing a character, using human implements, wearing clothes, dancing to music etc. Note: Some of the same physical movements can be presented in a “neutral” or educational context.

**6.2** The animals should be the primary focus of the demonstration. Trainers may play a “character” or “acting role” in the demonstration to engage the audience in order to deliver a specific message. They should never demean the animals and their conspecifics.

**6.3** Aerial behaviours and water work represent a natural form of communication and social interaction and a good opportunity for enrichment. These types of behaviours in a demonstration allow the representation of an animal’s strength, agility and group coordination capacities. In no circumstances should a behaviour serve to only show a trainer’s acrobatic capabilities.

**6.4** Trainers must never require animals to perform behaviours that can cause them physical harm. For example, an animal supporting a trainer’s full body weight on their vertebral or cervical column represents a potential veterinary concern. This is not applicable when both bodies are submerged.

- 6.5** This document does not aim to limit the trainers' interaction and enrichment capabilities. Trainers are encouraged to think creatively to develop novel behaviours or messaging contexts to create demonstration formats that meet current expectations within modern zoological settings.
- 6.6** Animals must receive all individual diet necessary for their health and maintenance regardless of training activities. Withholding of food is not permitted in this context.
- 6.7** The use of secondary reinforcement is a valid tool of the operant conditioning method. It should not, however, be used as a primary method with the aim of increasing demonstration duration and frequency. Guidelines on the number of training sessions (including demonstrations) will be addressed in species specific best practice guidelines.

## **7. Visitor Interactions**

- 7.1** A close encounter with, or connection between, marine mammals can be a life changing experience for visitors. When EAZA Members offer such opportunities they should remember that the animals' welfare must take precedence over human expectations.
- 7.2** All interaction programmes should provide conservation education messaging as part of their interaction.
- 7.3** Visitor interactions can be divided into:
  - 7.1.1** Indirect interactions; includes activities that do not involve direct physical contact between the animals and the visitors, nor allow participants to share the same environment where the animals are maintained. These hands-off interactions are carried out within restricted access zones. These activities can be carried out with all the species of marine mammals.
  - 7.1.2** Direct interactions; include activities that involve direct physical contact between the animals and the visitors and/or allowing participants to share the same environment where the animals are maintained (e.g. enter the pool or stand on a platform). Due to the risk represented by hazardous animals (*see EAZA Standards, 2019*) these activities are not permitted to be carried out with eared seals (adult males), walrus, grey seals (adult males), elephant and leopard seals and killer whales. This limitation is extended to individual animals of any species that are determined to be hazardous or aggressive as per judgement of the staff.
- 7.4** All visitor interaction programmes should follow well established protocols that describe the demonstration activities in detail as well the procedures for the safety and well-being of animals, visitors and staff.

**7.5** Institutional specific risk assessments for all visitor interactions are strongly recommended (if not required by national legislation). Regular emergency drills (at least annually) are also recommended as part of the entire safety process.

7.5.1 As part of the safety procedures, the interaction protocol should include visitor health emergency procedures regarding animal induced injury.

7.5.2 Visitor access to animal areas should be strictly regulated. Visitors participating in the interaction should be given clear instructions and be guided by clearly marked access areas through the interaction pathways.

7.5.3 The safety section of the interaction protocol should include approved footwear and flotation devices for in water interactions, swimming ability requirements for deep water interactions and disabled visitor procedures. Clear instructions on the role and authority of the trainers including the right of the trainer to end the interaction at any time, should be communicated upfront.

7.5.4 As part of the interaction protocol a medical section should be available and include specific procedures to be carried out in case of immune compromised participants. Regular diagnostic and microbiological screening for both animals and water should be carried out.

7.5.5 A tailor-made hygiene section should always be part of the interaction protocol and at minimum include a safe disinfection procedure and direct hand washing -or showering in case of visitor entering the water- before and after the interaction.

**7.6** Direct and Indirect visitor encounter:

7.6.1 Play and enrichment opportunities (hose play, ball toss, frozen enrichment, etc) with visitors are encouraged, benefitting both human and animal.

7.6.2 Beaching is a natural behaviour for cetaceans and can occur voluntarily but should not be part of daily visitor interactions and should be limited to husbandry/veterinary behaviours or use in demonstrations.

7.6.3 Time used for photo posing should be limited, and focused on VIP tours, behind the scenes tours or educational camps. Photo posing recommendations will be outlined in the species specific EAZA best practice guidelines.

7.6.4 Kissing/hugging behaviours are not recommended due to health and safety risks

**7.7** Feeding by visitors (where legally allowed) should only be carried out under control of a trainer and in full respect of the individual animal's diet; free feed pools with purchased fish portions must not be carried out.

**7.8** Animal welfare protocols must ensure that the interaction programme is aligned with the EAZA Standards and available best practice guidelines. The protocols should outline the facilities' policy on frequency of participation (how often an animal participates in an interaction programme) and the policy for removing an animal from a scheduled programme due to health or behavioural changes, dietary prescriptions, reproductive state, etc.

## **8. Messaging and Conservation Education**

**8.1** Conservation education must be the aim of the demonstration as per the EAZA Standards. Current topics such as single-use plastics, over fishing, by catch, etc. could all be delivered within the demonstration to encourage behavioural change opportunities among our visitors. Conservation status in the wild, threats to habitats, and the zoo community's role in conservation and research are also potential topics.

**8.2** Educational messaging should be developed with the assistance of the educational team at the facility. Messaging must be based on up to date scientific facts and this should be consistent prior to, during and after the animal demonstration section.

**8.3** Biological information relating to anatomy (brain size, tooth shape, appendages, etc.), sensory systems (echolocation, vision), cognition and physiology (brain and lung function, swimming capacities, reproduction, etc.) could also be used to share up to date information learned about the species through current research and years of historical data.

**8.4** Language and messaging should be carefully prepared in advance, to prevent misleading or negative connotations and provide a proper educational context.

**8.5** Inspiration, fascination, connection, and emotional engagement are important ways to engender behavioural change in visitors. Use of creative displays and messaging that connect visitors with the animals and with nature are encouraged. Visitors should leave with a sense of awe about the capabilities of the animals, and with a message about the need to protect the oceans.

## **9. Implementation**

**9.1** This document will serve as a guidance document for EAZA accreditation screenings. The screening team will evaluate marine mammal demonstrations during the screening visit, and any elements of the demonstrations that do not meet this guideline will be outlined in the screening report that is delivered to both the member and the Membership and Ethics Committee. When matters arise in relation to these guidelines outside of the EAZA Accreditation Programme process such cases will be dealt with in accordance with existing



processes and procedures in EAZA (as described in the EAZA Standards, Code of Ethics or the EAZA Population Management Manual).

- 9.2** The implementation of this guideline document will be monitored by the EAZA EEP Committee and the Marine Mammal TAG as well as the EAZA Membership and Ethics Committee. A report will be prepared three years after the approval of this document.