

Background / Title: Dr. Heather Rally is a California licensed veterinarian with specific training in marine mammal medicine and dolphin health assessment. She is the Supervising Veterinarian of Captive Animal Law Enforcement with the PETA Foundation in the United States.

Statement: Video footage indicates that numerous animals are currently being held captive in deplorable conditions at Inubosaki Marine Park in Choshi City, Chiba Prefecture, Japan. Among them is a dolphin, referred to as “Honey,” housed in isolation in an excessively small, decrepit, and filthy tank with apparent algal overgrowth, extensive paint erosion, and excessive rusting of the surrounding metal fencing which appears to be draining into the pool. Furthermore, there is no shade above this dolphin’s tank to protect her from harmful UV radiation from which she cannot escape. Housing a dolphin in these conditions is cruel and inhumane and is inconsistent with professionally-accepted zoological standards.

Furthermore, I have evaluated video footage taken between May and August 2018 by local Japanese activists and the media that depicts this dolphin’s physical condition and behavior. Honey appears to be suffering from a loss of buoyancy control and, more specifically, from excessive buoyancy as evidenced by her abnormal surface bobbing behavior, increased effort when submerging, and her elevated position with occasional listing to one side while at rest. Further evidence includes the presence of secondary skin lesions on her dorsum near the blowhole, an area of her body which she appears to be having difficulty submerging and as a result has become chronically dry and sunburnt.

Buoyancy is dictated by the amount of water that is displaced by the animal’s body, which can change whenever there is abnormal gas or fluid accumulation in the chest or abdominal cavities. In captive dolphins the chest is the most common place where abnormal gas or fluid accumulation occurs, and this is typically related to pneumonia or another illness of the lungs. Buoyancy disruption in dolphins is a clinical sign indicative of potentially serious disease that requires urgent veterinary attention and diagnostic workup. This is particularly true considering that pneumonia in dolphins is a deadly disease that can progress rapidly and become difficult or impossible to treat.

Therefore, it is my professional opinion that the highly substandard conditions in which this dolphin is being housed are a direct threat to her health and wellbeing. Her appearance suggests that she is suffering from an internal disease process causing buoyancy disruption and secondary skin disease, which are undoubtedly distressing and painful. In light of this, I believe this dolphin to be in immediate need of veterinary evaluation and treatment by a qualified, third-party, marine mammal veterinarian.