

An international organization dedicated to conservation through public display, education, and research

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Schiff Bill to “Phase Out” Orcas in Human Care Wrong, Would Set Dangerous Precedent for Other Species in Zoos & Aquariums

Background: Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) today announced he will introduce the Orca Responsibility and Care Advancement (ORCA) Act, which would phase out the public display of orcas in the U.S. and prohibit breeding, wild capture, and import and export of the animals.

“Rep. Schiff’s legislation is wrong and would set a very dangerous precedent. If Congress prohibits zoos and aquariums from holding orcas today, which species will be next, and what impact will that have on conservation and education?”

There are only a handful of facilities in the U.S. today where visitors have the opportunity to see orcas up close. Research on the orcas in these zoological institutions has taught us much of what we know today about these animals and provided the practical, hands-on skills that enable successful rescue and rehabilitation of cetaceans in the wild. This short-sighted bill would take away forever the opportunity to see these majestic animals up close, bring to an end the cutting-edge scientific research that is only possible with animals in human care, and jeopardize the voluntary rescue and rehabilitation work with large cetaceans done by aquariums, marine parks and zoos throughout the country.

This bill would also sacrifice for decades the welfare of the orcas currently in zoological institutions by disrupting the familial environments they now enjoy and forcing the separation of males and females.

Killer whales were once feared and even used as target practice. Today they are iconic animals that people love and want to protect. This change has come about because of the work of marine parks and aquariums that have displayed and educated people about them over the last 50 years. This should not be taken for granted. Each generation can benefit from the opportunity to see these animals in person. Denied that opportunity, public attitudes could revert to what they were in the past.

As Rep. Schiff has himself acknowledged, the public display of animals in zoological settings can engage children, create respect for wildlife and contribute to scientific knowledge. Congress should support and not interfere with these important contributions.”

-Kathleen Dezio, Executive Director
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