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Dear Sir/Madam

I was perplexed to hear that Dolphin Marine Magic has been accused by the media of not working with researchers.

I am an Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales where I lead a research lab. Formally I was the Director of the Australian Marine Mammal Research Centre a collaboration between the University of Sydney, University of NSW and the Zoological Parks Board of NSW. It is within both these roles that I have been involved with research projects in collaboration with Dolphin Marine Magic.

My collaboration with DMM began when I was a PhD student myself. At the time they were named the Pet Porpoise Pool. The support and assistance I was given by the staff allowed me to work on the parks captive leopard seal. From this program I developed a field-based program on Antarctic leopard seals, the first of its kind at the time. Leopard seals were believed to be too difficult to work on in the wild, due to logistical constraints. However the work conducted with the captive leopard seal at DMM and Taronga Zoo convinced the Australian Antarctic Division to support an Antarctic-based leopard seal program. The leopard seal is now studied by several international Antarctic agencies, the UKs British Antarctic survey, US NOAA program, Argentinean IAA and several different research groups. I am currently a Research Scholar of the University of Cambridge completing a study that has shown that the leopard seal has been a sentinel of environmental change within the Antarctic ecosystem. This work would not have come to light if it were not for the opportunity to ground-truth this study with captive populations, of which DMM was crucial in the early involvement.

I have had a few students since then who have been supported by DMM. Dr Tiffanie Nelson conducted her PhD program on understanding the development of microbiota of marine mammals, how these systems evolve, are inherited and are sustained. Dr Nelson was provided with samples by the staff at DMM. Dr Nelson completed her PhD, two years ago and is now a scientist in the US. She wrote several papers on the microbiota of marine mammals, some of this material was provided to her by DMM. The staff of the DMM were extremely helpful and supportive in their involvement with her project. I currently have a PhD student, Kobe Martin, who has been working at DMM to obtain research material for her PhD.

In my interactions with DMM I have observed and have been told by my students, that the staff encourage a wide range of research with their animals and are willing to do as much to help

researchers like my team, where ever possible. The management and keepers alike show a great deal of interest in the research which is carried out and endeavour to use this research to better their own practices where applicable.

Australia does not have a culture of philanthropy towards research, we tend to support our sport rather than our scientists, and this is particularly noticeable to me as I work quite often in the UK at Cambridge. So I was driven to write this letter because it made me very disappointed to see our national paper criticise an establishment which is very small (without a big budge), but that has a long history of being very supportive to researchers, senior researchers and students alike.

I wish to offer my full support of Dolphin Marine Magic. I have been very glad of our research collaboration and look forward to continuing a collaboration with them into the future.

Sincerely



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