**Miami Seaquarium statement:**

March 6, 2018

Miami Seaquarium has the utmost respect for the Lummi Nation and the services that the Lummi Business Council provides to its people. However, the members of the Lummi Business Council are not marine mammal experts and are misguided when they offer a proposal that is not in the best interest of Lolita the orca.

A pressing concern is the welfare of the killer whales near the home of the Lummi Business Council. The Southern Resident Killer Whales of the Pacific Northwest are endangered and their population is rapidly dwindling due to overfishing, boat noise and chemical runoff that has polluted Puget Sound. The focus should not be on a whale that is thriving in her environment in Miami.

After more than 47 years, moving Lolita from her pool, which she shares with Pacific white-sided dolphins, to a sea pen in Puget Sound or anywhere else would be very stressful to her and potentially fatal.  In addition, there is no scientific evidence that the over 50 year-old post-reproductive Lolita could survive if she were to be moved from her home at Miami Seaquarium to a sea pen or to the open waters of the Pacific Northwest. It would be reckless and cruel to treat her life as an experiment and jeopardize her health to consider such a move.

A recent news article that published in The Miami Herald, whose reporter spoke to a dozen experts on killer whales around the nation including experts without a stake in Lolita’s case, advised against moving Lolita.  Douglas Wartzok and others agree that the stress of moving Lolita could be catastrophic. The following is an excerpt from MiamiHerald.com story:

[*“You have to face the fact that this is not a theoretical animal. This is one real animal that I think people on both sides of the conversation have to step back and say, ‘What’s best for this particular animal at this particular stage of her life?’” said Douglas Wartzok, professor emeritus and professor of biology at Florida International University, who has a Ph.D. in biophysics. “It’s not an easy answer, [but] my opinion is it’s probably better to leave the animal where she has lived for the past 47 years.”*](http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/article185517463.html)

Lolita will continue to be an ambassador for her species from her home at Miami Seaquarium, educating park guests on the plight of the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales of the Pacific Northwest.

Eric A. Eimstad

General Manager

Miami Seaquarium

**Additional responses to questions posed by Louis Aguirre on March 7, 2018:**

***Why won’t Mr. Eimstad take a meeting with a Lummi delegation?***

There is no point in participating in any discussion in regards moving Lolita from her home at Miami Seaquarium. As has been said many times before by the park and marine mammal experts, after 47 years at Miami Seaquarium, any sort of move would not be in Lolita’s best interest.
***How long will Lolita continue to perform?***

Lolita’s daily schedule of public presentations, learning sessions and play are constantly monitored and evaluated by the Miami Seaquarium animal care and veterinarian staff to insure her continued health and vitality.

***Will the Seaquarium allow an independent veterinarian who specializes in Marine Mammals to examine Lolita and assess her physical and emotional well being?***

Lolita’s health is of the utmost concern to Miami Seaquarium. She is regularly examined by our veterinary staff. In addition, the USDA, who oversees the care and housing of marine mammals has independently verified Lolita’s health and well-being.

***She’s been living in the world’s smallest orca tank for 47 years. It does not meet federal requirements for an animal of her size. Why hasn’t the Seaquarium done anything to increase her living space? Does the Seaquarium not recognize that Lolita deserves a bigger living space?***

Miami Seaquarium has always adhered to the federal government’s rules and regulations. Lolita’s habitat has been certified by the USDA as “…meets the intent and the letter of the law with regard to space requirements for orcas.” They also state her habitat, “far exceeds the minimum requirements established by the AWA (Animal Welfare Act) regulations.”

Space is not relative to the overall health of Lolita. Having that bigger pool or that large ocean isn't going to help her in any way shape or form. Change can be very hard, especially as you get older. Lolita has lived in her home at Miami Seaquarium for 47 years. She is very much a ‘creature of habit’ and does not respond well to changes in her environment. After more than four decades, moving Lolita from her pool, whether it is to a sea pen or a new pool at Miami Seaquarium, would be very stressful to her and potentially fatal. Even the construction required to extend and/or enlarge her existing pool would also be stressful and harmful to her health.

***While it is pretty much the consensus of the scientific community that it would be very difficult for Lolita to survive as a “free orca”, there are no absolutes and no one knows for sure. The comparison to Keiko is not a fair one. Lolita’s pod has been identified and in fact the current retirement plan proposed by the Orca network would transport her to a seaside pen off Orcas Island where her family still can be seen to this day.
There is great consensus that retiring her to a sea pen or seaside sanctuary, where she would* receive the same care, attention and nourishment she is currently receiving, would in fact work. What is the Seaquarium’s response to this?**

The statement that there is ‘great consensus’ that retiring Lolita to a sea pen would work is factually untrue. Please refer to the Miami Herald article on Lolita dated: November 20, 2017.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/article185517463.html>

What is true is that that the Southern Resident Killer Whales of Puget Sound are endangered. Lolita is thriving in her home of 47 years, while the killer whales of the Pacific Northwest, near the home of the Lummi Nation, need help.

<http://awesomeocean.com/news/tilikum-j34-tale-two-killer-whales/>

***What will happen to Lolita if, for whatever reason the Seaquarium is sold or cannot afford her upkeep one day? Orcas can live well into their 80s and while the Seaquarium has not publicly released their attendance records, we’ve seen attendance drop to record lows at SeaWorld who just last week forced their CEO to resign given poor revenue and plummeting stock values. Is there a plan in place to look after Lolita if one day the Seaquarium ceases to be?***

Miami Seaquarium is owned and operated by Palace Entertainment, a leader in the United States leisure park industry. Palace Entertainment is committed to the success of Miami Seaquarium and the continued care of Lolita.

***Why wasn’t Lolita secured when Hurricane Irma hit?***

Lolita’s home at Miami Seaquarium has been through many hurricanes since her arrival in 1970 and once again the pool and surrounding stadium faired very well in this storm. The roof structure over the guest seating area was replaced and reinforced in the past two years and was not damaged in the storm. In addition, two 300 KW generators are located on site to insure that the water in Lolita’s habitat is circulating and refrigerated, if the park were to lose power. Post-storm, Lolita and her com panion dolphins were all in good health and doing well.

In preparation for the possible effects of Hurricane Irma, Miami Seaquarium implemented its Hurricane Preparation Procedures. These protocols, which are constantly updated, clearly detail the necessary animal safety and precautionary measures that were implemented at the park prior to the storms arrival. Once the storm passed, the park’s dedicated team has been working tirelessly to insure that all of the enclosures and habitats are being properly maintained and that the animals are healthy and safe.