



Dolphin capture refused

CONSERVATION Minister Denis Marshall turned down an application in December from the Hawke's Bay Marineland for the capture of six common dolphins and a leopard seal.

The decision is significant as it is unlikely that permission to capture wild dolphins for display in New Zealand will ever be granted again. An important submission by Forest and Bird's Alan Tennyson helped argue the case against their capture.

Marineland is the only oceanarium in New Zealand displaying live dolphins. In turning down the application Mr Marshall said that Marineland was the only institution in the world to keep common dolphins, a species notoriously difficult to take into captivity and successfully acclimatise in an oceanarium.

Dolphins were first caught for display in Europe in the mid-19th century. From the 1930s they have been captured regularly for research purposes, while specialised dolphinariums first appeared in the 1950s, in the United States.

A large proportion of dolphins captured for display never make it to the oceanarium, but die during capture or in transit. Those that do survive are subject, in the lower-grade institutions, to poor hygiene, sanitation and feeding, and choking on objects thrown by spectators. Even in better equipped institutions they often don't adjust to life in captivity, suffering high stress and boredom. The complex environment and social life of existence in the wild cannot be replicated. Certainly the average life span of a captive marine mammal is significantly shorter than in



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A common dolphin goes through its routine at Marineland. With the capture of dolphins unlikely to be allowed again in New Zealand, "entertainment" of this nature will eventually be phased out.

the wild.

The main argument for dolphinariums is that they are educational, and develop in audiences a sense of respect for the animals that bolsters the efforts of conservationists to protect them in the wild. However, the educational value of captive animals is limited because they do not exhibit genuine natural behaviour in an artificial environment.

Many countries are now beginning to reassess the morality of keeping dolphins in captivity. In 1988 Victoria, Australia, passed laws prohibiting the capture and display of dolphins. In New South Wales all dolphinariums except one have been closed down. In the United Kingdom a report on standards in dolphinariums resulted in three quarters of them having to close rather than carry out necessary upgrading.

Dolphinariums still remain in many countries especially in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and the United States, and wild dolphins, mainly bottlenose but occasionally rare species such as beluga,

continue to be captured for display. The sonar capabilities of trained dolphins are also used for military purposes such as the recovery of test torpedoes.

A hopeful sign of change, however, is the growing popularity of viewing marine mammals in their natural habitats. All over the world dolphin and whale-watching cruises allow people to experience these animals in their own environment.

Kakapo comeback?

THIS LAST YEAR has been one of mixed success in the fight to save the world's largest parrot from extinction. Six chicks hatched recently on Codfish Island but only three have survived.

Just over 50 kakapo are believed to exist and fewer than 16 of them are female. Their high vulnerability to introduced predators and competitors, coupled with a remarkably low natural reproductive rate have been the cause of the bird's decline. No natural population remains and virtually all re-

maining birds have, in the past decade, been relocated on Little Barrier, Maud or Codfish Islands.

The \$2-million six-year kakapo recovery programme began in 1989 as a partnership between the Department of Conservation and Forest and Bird, with funding from aluminium maker Comalco.

Last summer male kakapo on all three islands (all reserves managed by DoC) attained breeding condition and "boomed" intensely. On Codfish Island near Stewart Island, more than 20 bowl systems (male booming and courtship sites) were developed and used by the birds, indicating that most, if not all, of the 20 males released there since 1987 had survived and were in breeding condition. Booming, a characteristic male courtship display, was intense each night from late January until mid-March.

This was the first sustained booming on Codfish since the birds were released there. The booming and associated courtship displays were not in vain. At least 11 eggs were laid in four nests and six