

November 23, 2015

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum  
Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai

Your Highness,

I am writing today because SeaWorld, a corporation that is garnering international condemnation for its treatment of marine animals, is trying to export its dying business model to Dubai. I am asking you, a respected leader and businessperson who works to drive a robust economy in Dubai, for your help in keeping SeaWorld out.

I was pleased to be approached to become SeaWorld Dubai's senior trainer—tasked with acclimating, training, and performing with the whales as well as managing and training the staff—before the project was put on hold in 2009. I was very much looking forward to making Dubai my home. I have a profound respect and appreciation for your country, its culture, and your family.

During my 14-year career, I was promoted to the highest rank of orca trainer at SeaWorld, where I trained and swam with orcas at the SeaWorld parks in California and Texas, and I also acted as supervisor of orca training at Marineland in France. I eventually came to realize that marine theme parks like SeaWorld must be relegated to the history books—and I'm not alone in that belief.

In Dubai and around the world, there is a growing backlash against keeping marine animals in captivity. Since the debut of the riveting documentary *Blackfish*, which has been viewed by more than 150 million people worldwide; and the releases of both my book, *Beneath the Surface*, and David Kirby's book, *Death at SeaWorld*; as well as PETA's intensified educational campaign, people have been staying away from SeaWorld in droves. Earnings are down a crushing 84 percent. *Fortune* referred to the company as a "sinkhole," and Standard & Poor's lowered its credit rating to "junk" status.

Attendance is down, even with the parks slashing ticket prices and spending \$10 million on a media blitz. Dozens of SeaWorld's former corporate partners have severed their ties. Nearly 236,000 people have already signed petitions asking the government of Dubai to reject SeaWorld's proposal.

SeaWorld is also drowning in lawsuits. The most recent one, filed in a U.S. federal court, alleges that the corporation hid the mistreatment of its captive orcas by using deceptive and false advertising. Three similar lawsuits have been filed against SeaWorld this year alone.

There was outrage throughout the United Arab Emirates a few years ago when a whale shark, Sammy, was captured near Jebel Ali. After a massive public response and a decree issued by Minister of Environment and Water His Excellency Dr. Rashid Ahmad bin Fahad to free her, Sammy was released back into the Arabian Gulf. The Dubai Aquarium & Underwater Zoo faced the same public outrage when at least 40 sharks died prior to its grand opening in 2008. Letters


to the editor throughout the Emirates denounced the conditions for animals kept in cages and tanks.

Eight whales—valued at between US\$15 million and \$20 million each—died in SeaWorld's tanks in the last 10 years alone, and two orcas recently died at France's Marineland.

Allowing SeaWorld to take its cruel business model to Dubai—where kind people do not want it—would be a public relations disaster.

I hope you, as someone deeply invested in the future of Dubai, will stop SeaWorld from trying to use your city as a life raft for its antiquated water circus. Dubai would be throwing money down the drain if it invests one dirham in SeaWorld.

Most respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hargrove". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John Hargrove