

KIM BASINGER

October 3, 2012

P. Michael Payne
Chief, Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Payne:

I am a native Georgian, born and raised in Athens, and have an inseparable connection to the South and that unparalleled spirit that is all its own. I am proud of having come from there and being given the many opportunities that this beautiful state has offered me through the years, from entertainment to arts and recreation ... not to mention its beautiful beaches, mountains, etc.

But I was truly disturbed upon hearing that the Georgia Aquarium wants to import 18 beluga whales who were caught in Russia and are currently at a research center there. As I have learned, it has been many years since captive-animal facilities imported animals who were caught in the wild and not allegedly stranded. Now I hear that the aquarium is trying to open the door to that option once again ... a move that will be disastrous.

I truly implore you to oppose the importation of the belugas into the United States, where they will be deprived of their natural lives in the ocean and kept in captivity in a tank that, to them, is not much more than the size of a bathtub.

It is hard to imagine the participation of the United States in depriving these wild, free-living, and untamed animals of their very lives, of their families in the ocean, and of all that is natural and enjoyable to them. The time has passed when it was acceptable to keep living beings like these in captivity, allowing private enterprises to profit from breeding them.

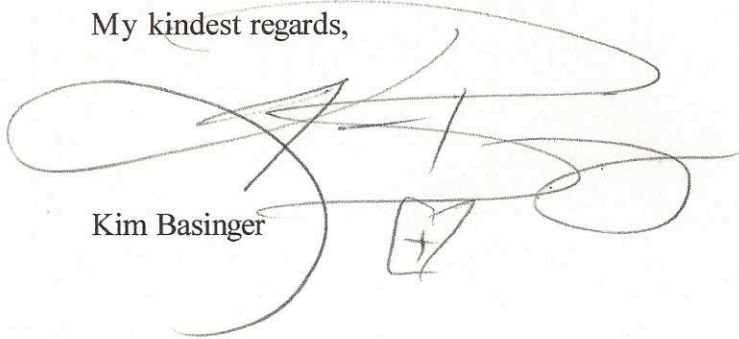
If it puts all heaven in a rage to see a songbird in a cage, then it surely puts every decent soul on Earth in one to see a marine mammal in a cement tank.

This unconscious way of thinking would set us back decades. It would be extremely cruel and would send a treacherous message to future generations.

The Georgia Aquarium is said to be a state-of-the-art facility, light-years ahead of all others in marine technology, exploration, and newly found discoveries for the care and protection of marine animals. This would be an abhorrently detrimental and a just plain wrong decision on every level. The new aquarium in Toronto has just confirmed that it will not confine marine mammals at all. Surely Georgia will not go in the other direction, away from respect and understanding for such magnificent forms of life?

Please reject the importation of these magnificent animals, who belong to the whole world and who belong in the open oceans.

My kindest regards,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a central vertical stroke. The signature is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Kim Basinger