

**Media Release**  
**29<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

## **Call for a ban on controversial Dolphin Assisted Therapy**

WDCS, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, is today calling for a total ban on Dolphin Assisted Therapy (DAT), stating that the therapy provided is ineffective and potentially harmful to both people and animals.

DAT is a controversial therapy that involves close interaction with dolphins, usually through swimming with these animals in captivity or in their natural environment, and is promoted as a treatment or respite from illness and disability. However, in a new report, titled 'Can you put your faith in DAT?', WDCS has uncovered the shocking truth behind the rapidly expanding DAT industry.

In a move supported by health charity Research Autism, WDCS has called for a total ban on DAT after researching the therapy and discovering that:

- There is **no scientific evidence** to prove that the therapy is effective.
- There are **no official standards** or regulation governing the industry.
- **Dolphins are removed from the wild** to stock the growing number of DAT facilities, and this has both serious conservation and welfare implications for the animals.
- Both people and animals can be **exposed to infection and injury** when participating in DAT.
- DAT is extremely **costly** despite the lack of evidence of its success and there are other therapies available that are both cheaper and easier to obtain.

Richard Mills of Research Autism agrees with the findings of the report. He said: "Research Autism endorses the WDCS report which highlights the fact that there is no evidence that dolphin therapy aids people with autism. We believe this type of therapy is extremely expensive and potentially harmful to both people with autism and the dolphins. There is no good quality research to support its use and therefore we would urge people to exercise caution when considering such an undertaking."

Cathy Williamson, one of the authors of the report said: "There is no scientific evidence that DAT is effective in the long-term for participants. Furthermore, it is costly to both the humans seeking therapy and the dolphins which are kept in captive conditions, and sometimes removed from the wild in order to provide this 'service'. Having researched this industry the only recommendation we can make is that there is a total ban on DAT.

"This therapy involves vulnerable people and also exploits the dolphins, which are forced to interact with people in conditions that are far from suitable for wild animals. We know that keeping dolphins in captivity has serious welfare implications for these animals,

including a shorter life expectancy than in the wild, and we are saddened that the growing DAT industry in causing more and more animals to be subjected to a life in captivity.”

The process of removing dolphins from the wild is incredibly stressful to the animals, involving them being ‘rounded up’ by boats or trapped by nets. Many dolphins die as a result of the experience, and those that are later transferred to other facilities still have a shorter life expectancy.

**Notes to Editors:**

**For more information, images or interviews, please contact Emma Butler, Press Officer on 01249 449 534 or 07834 498 277 or email [emma.butler@wdc.org](mailto:emma.butler@wdc.org)**

**A copy of the report and an accompanying leaflet can be found at [www.wdc.org](http://www.wdc.org)**

**To contact Research Autism, please call Bernard Fleming on 020 8292 8900**

**Trade in dolphins:** It was recently reported that some of the 28 dolphins exported from the Solomon Islands to Dubai earlier this month were to be used in a facility planning to offer a form of DAT . This exportation was allowed to go ahead despite WDCS’s belief that it contravened trade laws.