

Monday, October 6, 2025

The Honourable Doug Ford

Premier of Ontario

Legislative Building

Queen's Park

Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford,

Ontario faces a defining moment in how it responds to this crisis at Marineland. Media reports say the company has warned that without federal export permits approved to send the belugas to China, or receive public funding, it will unnecessarily euthanize the belugas. This unprecedented threat highlights the risk of unnecessary mass euthanasia or a fire sale of the hundreds of other animals owned by Marineland, and strengthens our call for you, Premier, to step in immediately to prevent further tragedy.

The Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act gives Ontario the authority to act now to support the animals, provide immediate care, and recover costs. The Government of Ontario must exercise these powers urgently, followed by the formal seizure of the animals in question. Ontario can ensure that the animals at Marineland are independently assessed by veterinary experts, so each one receives a humane and compassionate outcome – giving as many as possible a second chance at life.

At the same time, there is an opportunity for Ontario to play a national leadership role in advancing the planned whale sanctuary in Nova Scotia – the first of its kind in North America. With your decisive leadership, Ontario can work with Ottawa and the Government of Nova Scotia to clear any remaining regulatory hurdles and make the sanctuary a reality. That would not only provide a humane future for at least some of these animals, but also establish Canada as a global leader in whale protection.

We know you expressed disappointment at the federal government's decision to deny export permits for Marineland's belugas. But it was the right decision. Sending them abroad would have risked perpetuating their role as entertainment, and the possibility of new generations being bred in captivity. This would have undermined Canada's leadership in phasing out whale and dolphin captivity through federal legislation passed in 2019. For animals that cannot be relocated in Canada, only the highest accredited facilities in the United States or Europe, where welfare outcomes can be independently verified, should be considered for new export permits.

Premier Ford, you have built your reputation on doing what's right and getting it done. This is your moment to prove both. By acting now under Ontario's own laws, and by working across jurisdictions to advance the sanctuary, you can stop a preventable tragedy and cement Ontario's place as a leader in animal welfare.

You can succeed where others have hesitated by showing the kind of provincial leadership that cuts through red tape and delivers real results.

But this cannot stop at Marineland. It must be followed with a commitment to finally reform Ontario's outdated captive wildlife laws. Anyone can open a new 'Marineland' without needing expertise in animal care, and they can acquire as many wild animals as they like, with the only restrictions applying to whales, porpoises and dolphins. This regulatory vacuum allowed Marineland to accumulate hundreds of animals in deplorable conditions leading to this crisis.

Premier Ford, you have the chance to make history – to be remembered as the Premier who stepped in, saved these animals, and left Ontario a safer, more humane province for generations to come.

We, animal protection organizations, accredited zoos, and leading experts, stand ready to support your government with the scientific expertise, hands-on experience and international networks needed to make this transition successful.

We respectfully urge you to act now, before it is too late.

On behalf of the undersigned,

World Animal Protection

British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA)

Animal Law Program at the Henry N. R. Jackman Faculty of Law, University of Toronto

Animal Environmental Legal Advocacy (AEL Advocacy)

Humane World for Animals Canada

Zoocheck Canada

Animal Justice

Dr. Heather Rally, Founder and Director, Thrive Wild

Marine Connection

Toronto Zoo

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (UK)

Animal Welfare Institute (AWI)

CC: Hon. Joanne Thompson, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans of Canada

CC: Hon. Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General of Ontario

CC: Sylvia Gualtieri, Parliamentary Assistant to the Solicitor General of Ontario

CC: Mike Harris, MPP, Kitchener-Conestoga