



Animal Welfare Institute

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July 16, 2021

Dr. Carolyn McKinnie
Senior Staff Veterinarian
APHIS Animal Care
4700 River Road
Riverdale, MD 20737-1238

Sent via email

Dear Dr. McKinnie:

I am writing on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) and its members and constituents with regard to Lolita, the orca held at Miami Seaquarium (MSQ).

Beginning on July 6 and then again on July 8, 15, and 16, AWI has received five voice mail messages, directed specifically at me, from an anonymous woman who has expressed significant concerns about the current care provided to Lolita. She claims that the “entire managed care team” at MSQ has changed over the past six months, including the whale’s lead veterinarian. She implied that the veterinarian was terminated due to their reaction to APHIS’s last inspection (it was not possible to determine whether she was suggesting the veterinarian was fired due to positive or negative factors from the point of view of MSQ’s current management—there was some suggestion that the veterinarian may have objected to how the facility executives reacted to that APHIS inspection, but this was not clear). She says that the current care team has been withholding food (a serious allegation if true, likely in violation of 9 C.F.R. § 3.105) and the new veterinarian has been administering steroids to Lolita to allow her to perform.

The anonymous caller urged AWI to send someone to record the show (as she claimed the show has changed considerably since I was last there in 2015 and this change is somehow indicative of how Lolita’s care has deteriorated, although I am uncertain what this means) and to view Lolita’s medical records, as she claims that Lolita’s bloodwork is now “very bad” and that the new veterinarian is saying Lolita “has congestive heart failure.” Apparently Lolita has always had kidney issues, but they have worsened, according to the caller, under the current care team. She said that the last person from Lolita’s previous care team left on July 15, so the caller no longer has access to inside information. Her last call expressed concern that the current care team was now “blaming” the previous care team for any problems that Lolita is presently experiencing and for the first time clarified that she herself was a member of Lolita’s previous care team.

These calls have been extremely disturbing. AWI strongly urges APHIS to send an experienced inspector to conduct an unannounced spot inspection of MSQ, including a review of veterinary

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records (e.g. those required by 9 C.F.R. § 3.110), as soon as possible, hopefully within the next week, to determine if this caller's concerns are based in reality. If they are accurate, AWI is deeply concerned that Lolita's immediate health is at considerable risk.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Naomi Rose", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Naomi A. Rose, Ph.D.
Marine Mammal Scientist

CC: Amy Sloan, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service