

'Animal attractions too popular to quit'

Thursday, March 25, 2010

[Philippa Jacks](#)

Demand for animal attractions such as dolphinariums and zoos is so high that operators can't afford to shun them – despite concerns over welfare, Tui boss **Dermot Blastland** has claimed.

The Tui UK managing director said one third of his company's excursions were animal related, and if the company did not offer them, customers would defect to rivals.

Operators should instead exert commercial pressure on attractions to ensure high welfare standards, Blastland told a **Born Free Foundation** debate on the use of animals in tourism.

Blastland said that of the 1.2 million Tui excursions booked by Tui passengers each year, 300,000 were animal related, with 200,000 alone involving dolphins.

Demand was often driven by wildlife programmes, such as a BBC survey in 2003 in which the public was asked to name things to do before you die: swimming with dolphins was number one.

Tui was unlikely to stop selling animal attractions such as those in Orlando while clients were still demanding them.

"People would just get on a **Virgin** aircraft instead," Blastland said.

But he said most Tui customers wanted to know animal welfare had been considered at the attractions they visited because when asked, 32% said it was very important and 34% important.

He emphasised that tour operators could bring commercial pressure to bear on animal attraction suppliers if they choose. "If we say we're not introducing a particular dolphin attraction, and explain to our customers why, we can have an impact," he said.

Virginia McKenna, founder of the Born Free Foundation and star of the 1966 film *Born Free*, said she did not believe any animal should be held captive. Referring to the orca which killed a trainer at **SeaWorld Orlando** last month, she said: "It's no wonder some animals become disturbed when they're kept in captivity."

"We have got to get to the bottom of this 'swim with dolphins' idea. Of course it's an incredible experience but it's not the same when it's in a confined space," she added.

