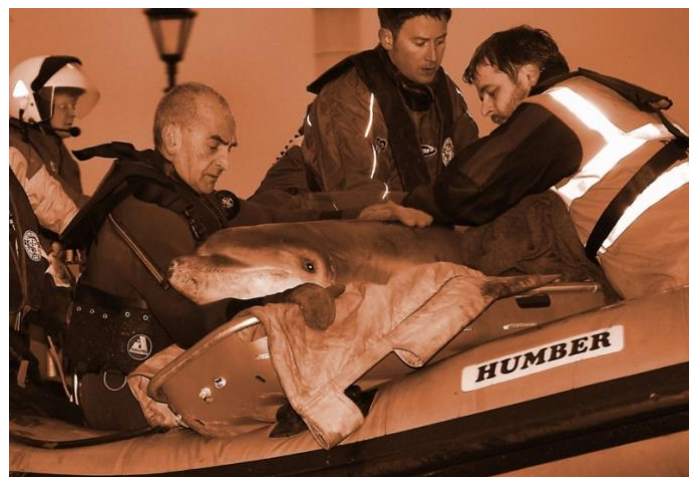


A tribute to Doug Cartlidge reformed dolphin trainer

1949–2025

By Mark Simmonds

Doug was a long-standing member of our rescue network. For most of the time when I knew him, he was a fireman, but his unique experience comes from the time when he was a dolphin trainer. In fact, he was a former Curator at Sea World Australia. This experience put him in a unique position to offer expert handling advice and also to take part in difficult dolphin rescues. He was, for example, highly instrumental and directly involved in the tricky rescue of Marra, the solitary-sociable dolphin from a small dock in Maryport harbour in 2006.



Doug with Marra the solitary-sociable bottlenose dolphin in his arms during her rescue

How he changed from being a dolphin trainer to being a powerful advocate opposing the keeping of dolphins and other cetaceans in captivity is recorded in a quote where he described his harrowing experience during a dolphin catch off the Great Barrier Reef. He explains thus:

"We caught three dolphins in our net and were bringing them in slowly. The first old one was too big for a show dolphin. The next one was scarred where sharks had had a go at it and was too big anyway, so they both went over the side. The next one was a beautiful six-footer and as clean as a whistle. 'We'll have this one', we decided, and we started to pack up.

Then I saw the two dolphins we had put over the net just sitting about 30ft away, looking at us. I don't know what it was, but I just felt guilty. And then suddenly it hit me. I realised what we had was their two-year-old baby. All the way back to the main boat they followed us. I was near to tears. It was the way they were looking

at me. They weren't sitting up in the water, they were just lying on their sides and watching with one eye out of the water."

More than any other single factor, Doug said that it was this experience that caused him to turn against the industry and take his case to the public.

"It is no crusade," he is further quoted as saying. "I can only publicise what is wrong in the industry until the public sees it's wrong. When that happens, at least two childless dolphins out in the Pacific Ocean will finally have made their point."

In addition to his anti-captivity advocacy, Doug was a strong voice in the UK rescue network from the earliest days of MARC. He was, for example, an advocate for using punitive measures to try to stop wild dolphins developing potentially harmful behaviours, for example in the context of solitary-sociable dolphins. Whilst we have not adopted this approach, his knowledge and integrity allowed this matter to be thoroughly explored.

Personally, I will miss him in our meetings, he was a unique individual blessed with a kindly and sardonic wit, typically applied with an arched eyebrow and clever rhetoric. He helped the network to become what it is today, teaching me a few life lessons along the way, and those that knew him will, I am sure, remember him with affection and respect.

Condolences to his close friends and family.



Doug with his grandson James