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## Row over dolphin export becomes explosive

July 24 2003  
 By Craig Skehan  
 Honiara



Picture: KATE GERAGHTY  
 Two dead dolphins at a village near Honiara caught by one of the local Solomon Islander men now working for the Dolphin Export Syndicate

Villagers in the Solomon Islands have complained that large areas of coral reef are being destroyed by dynamite fishing to feed dolphins caught for export to overseas entertainment venues.

Andrew Kulebe, 28, of the village of Hadiana, said: "Many people are using dynamite to catch reef fish for the captive dolphins. There are explosions every day now."

He said locals were selling the fish to the operators of a dolphin export scheme on the island of Gela, off the nation's capital, Honiara.

There are reports that some dolphins are being caught on hooks, rather than nets, and that an unknown number have died while being transported by Solomon Islanders who are paid about \$A400 for them.

On the international market they are worth tens of thousands of dollars each and more than \$100,000 when trained.

At least four dolphins have died in Gela holding pens.

*The Age* has obtained photographs of some dolphins that were slaughtered for their meat by a Solomon Islands man who is organising the capture of dolphins for the live export operation. One picture shows a dolphin foetus taken from the womb.

Environmental groups have called on the Solomon Islands police and the Australian-led, law-and-order intervention force, which arrives today, to stop the dolphin export.

The Solomons' Government has said the operation is legal.

The first of a planned series of air shipments of dolphins, which left Honiara on Monday, has arrived in Mexico.

There have been reports that more than 30 of the dolphins were taken out of the Solomons, but the international export syndicate maintains that there were 28, and all had

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survived the journey.

There has been growing opposition to the scheme in the Solomon Islands and internationally, particularly to the dolphins being held in small, shallow pens in Honiara before departure. Dozens more dolphins are being kept off Gela.

In a letter to the *Solomon Star* newspaper published yesterday, Christopher Porter, the Canadian director of a company formed locally to run the dolphin export operation, wrote that all appropriate Government approvals had been granted.

"I came to this country with an awareness and understanding of the cultural values dolphins play in the society," Mr Porter wrote.

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