



ORNAMENTAL AQUATIC TRADE ASSOCIATION LTD
"The voice of the ornamental fish industry"

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On behalf of:

Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA)

Federation of British Herpetologists

Hawk Board

National Council for Aviculture

Parrot Society

Raptor Breeders UK

Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association (REPTA)

Responsible Reptile Keeping

Sustainable Users Network (SUN)



**THE
HAWK BOARD**



**Responsible
Reptile
Keeping**

Dear Mary Creagh CBE MP,

Cc:

Baroness Hayman

Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP

Lord Livermore

Sir Chris Bryant MP

Lord Stockwood

Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds MP

We are concerned that the Government response to the recent consultation on the Wildlife Trade Regulations **does not adequately meet the overarching objectives of this Government** and proposes **to maintain significant barriers for UK businesses** without clear demonstration of any conservation gains. This is in direct contradiction to the Government's growth agenda¹ and promises of support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)². In addition, there is evidence that continued implementation of EU derived regulation has actively led to suspected illegal activity, undermining legitimate businesses and confidence in the Government's ability to enforce its own rules (see Annex 1).

CITES is an international convention to which the UK is a party and is obliged to implement legislation to meet its obligations to the convention. However, the UK currently goes beyond its legal obligations to implement the convention **without clear demonstration of conservation benefit**. These measures (outlined in Annex 2) create significant burdens on SMEs and contribute significantly to government expenditure. Retention of these measures run contrary to the Government's wider commitments on regulatory reform and economic growth. In the Government's 2025 Spring Statement³, it was stated "*growth is the central mission of the Government*", with the Spring Tax Update setting out a series of measures focused on "*Reducing burdens on business to support economic growth*"⁴. In contrast, removal of these measures could support the Government in meeting its commitment to reduce departmental

¹ [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

² [Backing your business: our plan for small and medium sized businesses](#)

³ [Spring Statement 2025](#)

⁴ [Spring Tax Update](#)

spending by 15% by the end of the decade³, while also contributing to delivery of the key action set out in the Department for Business and Trade's 2025 *Backing your Business* report to "reduce the administrative costs of regulation for SMEs by 25%"². This would create an opportunity to reinvest existing expertise and resources towards delivering more direct conservation impact and supporting capacity-building in source countries. **Whilst we appreciate some efforts to deregulate within the Government response, we believe it is clear these measures do not go far enough to meet the Government's overarching objectives.**

Two of the most significant retained measures— Article 10 certification requirements and the requirement for import permits for Annex B species—are not core CITES obligations but additional controls inherited from the UK's previous implementation of EU wildlife trade regulations. These measures are not applied by other CITES Parties, with the exception of the EU. DEFRA has indicated these measures are being retained to avoid "compromising" conservation commitments, yet no evidence has been provided to demonstrate what conservation outcomes would be weakened by aligning the UK's approach with that of the wider international community. **We would welcome an example of where conservation outcomes elsewhere in the world have been compromised by the absence of these stricter measures.** Notably, stakeholder consensus in the consultation process supported removal or significant reform of both measures; the decision not to take this forward therefore risks undermining confidence that consultation feedback has been fully reflected in the final policy position. Further examples where stakeholder feedback does not appear to have been reflected in the final policy position are provided in Annex 3.

The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA), the Federation of British Herpetologists, the Hawk Board, the National Council for Aviculture, the Parrot Society, Raptor Breeders UK, Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association (REPTA), Responsible Reptile Keeping and the Sustainable Users Network (SUN) and their member businesses demonstrate a strong and collective commitment to conservation, such as captive breeding of endangered species and supporting conservation of habitats and wild populations in source countries, further information can be found in Annex 4. The proposals presented below (Annex 2) would allow the UK Government to support the British businesses without rowing

back on environmental standards, allowing targeted, meaningful support for conservation of endangered species.

To support British businesses and deliver Government commitments for growth, without compromising conservation, we would ask for Ministers to reconsider their response to the Government consultation on wildlife trade regulations and commit to targeted deregulation in key areas. Thank you for your time and consideration on this very important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Matthew Bond
OATA Chief Executive



The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) represents more than 800 UK businesses which provide fish-keepers (over 13% of UK households) with everything they need to set up and maintain a successful home aquarium, or manufacturers and plant growers, many of which are SMEs. Analysis has found that the UK ornamental aquatic trade is worth over £1bn annually, of which £660m is generated from retail sales.

Annex 1

Evidence of suspected illegality arising from existing CITES rules

The application of stricter measures (beyond core CITES requirements) can result in import suspensions, preventing trade in certain taxa or from specific range countries. These measures are justified by concerns about limited scientific capacity and/or governance in exporting states. They are argued to deliver conservation benefits by raising standards in range states and acting as an “*early warning system*” for emerging conservation issues. **However, these assumptions have not been fully assessed and do not consider potential negative consequences.**

Trade experience indicates that the UK-imposed Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) requirements and import permits for Annex B specimens create significant practical enforcement challenges and contribute to suspected illegal trade flows. The UK negative opinion on coral species from Queensland, Australia has been applied inconsistently, creating ongoing uncertainty within industry and potential non-compliance risks, **despite exports being permitted by the source country.**

As a trade association representing over 800 member business, OATA has provided extensive materials to assist with enforcement, including a published ID guide, details of suspect businesses, import permits and flight information identifying consignments of concern. **To date, we are not aware of any enforcement actions arising from this evidence.** This lack of visible enforcement has created serious pressures on compliant businesses, some of which have been unable to continue trading due to, in part, the continued availability of corals of uncertain legal status. There is a risk that future markets become dominated by illegitimate actors.

Since July 15th 2025, the import suspension on corals from Queensland was extended across Australia for several genera. We have provided evidence of these species being traded since this change and have been advised that import permits granted before the change in opinion would be accepted until the end of their 6 month validity period ([CITES Proof of Validity](#)). However we suggest that honouring these permits after an opinion change has given illegitimate actors time to adapt their procedures to circumvent rules.

OATA has developed guidance (awaiting final feedback from JNCC) to help industry source corals responsibly, aiming to encourage industry members to critically consider the origins of their corals and providing practical resources to support trade. Intelligence shared with us by knowledgeable, legitimate traders indicates repeated evidence of non-compliance has received no visible enforcement response. Compliant businesses remain at a competitive disadvantage while suspected illegality persists. **This raises questions about the value of retaining import permits for Annex B specimens if they cannot be effectively enforced.**

Annex 2

Alternatives to stricter measures

Governments commitments to UK businesses

The current Government has repeatedly committed to reducing administrative burdens on business—particularly SMEs—to support economic growth. This policy direction is clearly reflected across multiple recent statements and strategy documents, including:

- Statements by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (April 2025)⁵ confirming measures intended to “*support economic growth by reducing burdens on employers and small businesses*”, including reducing time spent on tax and customs administration.
- The 2025 Spring Tax Update⁶, which set out a suite of reforms explicitly aimed at “*reducing burdens on business to support economic growth*”.
- The Government’s Backing Your Business: Our plan for small and medium sized businesses⁷, which commits to cutting the administrative costs of regulation for business by 25% and recognises that SMEs represent 99.8% of UK businesses and 60% of private-sector employment; the overwhelming majority of our collective members fall within this category.
- A Parliamentary debate in September 2025⁸, reinforcing the intention to change the regulatory status quo to support small businesses and reiterating that economic growth remains the Government’s foremost priority.

Article 10 requirements

- In light of this current reform package, the stated Government goals to cut department expenditure by 15% by the end of the decade⁹ and the commitments to business as described above; we suggest that retention of any measures above and beyond core CITES requirements should be supported by clear, evidence-based conservation benefits.
 - The consultation document itself states reform should be “*based on best available evidence*”. **However, despite repeated requests, stakeholders have not been presented with evidence demonstrating any conservation benefit associated with retaining Article 10 certificates.**
- Currently, only the EU and the UK require Article 10 certificates. Within the EU, these were designed to manage enforcement challenges arising from a single customs

⁵ [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

⁶ [Tax update spring 2025: simplification, administration and reform summary - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ [Backing Your Business](#)

⁸ [Plan for Small Businesses - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

⁹ [Spring Statement 2025](#)

territory. Now that the UK is no longer part of the EU—and as an island nation—Article 10 requirements represent a clear example of a “burdensome legacy regulation”, as identified in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s 2025 [Regulatory Policy Outlook](#) report.

- Retaining Article 10 requirements, in any form, imposes costs on both business and Government, while placing UK operators at a competitive disadvantage internationally.
- Given the absence of demonstrated conservation benefit, and the Government’s stated objective of reducing regulatory and cost burdens on both business and Government, **it is unclear why complete removal of Article 10 requirements was not included as an option within the consultation.**
- A key change referenced in the Government response concerns “adding low-risk species to [Annex X of EC Regulation 865/2006](#) and allowing export and re-export permits to substitute for Article 10 certificates”.
 - Whilst we welcome this attempt to reduce burdens on businesses, we would ask for clear, consistent criteria be published regarding the requirements for a species being considered for inclusion on the “low-risk” criteria. This way stakeholders can provide feedback to ensure impacts on businesses are minimised.
- The Government response states it will “remove the need for Article 10 certificates for appropriately marked captive bred specimens of these species”.
 - However, this applies only to three tortoise species being added to Annex X, and no guidance has been provided on how appropriate marking would be applied to small-bodied species that may be added to Annex X in future.
- Retaining Article 10 requirements represents a higher-cost regulatory approach with no demonstrated conservation benefit, whereas removal represents a lower-cost option that supports SMEs, aligns with deregulation commitments, and enables investment in more effective conservation activity.
- While we continue to support the complete removal of Article 10 requirements, an alternative compromise approach could be the introduction of a legal obligation for sellers to provide a form of self-certification confirming that specimens offered for sale are of legal provenance in accordance with CITES requirements.
 - Such a declaration could operate within an existing civil sanctions framework, with the potential for criminal enforcement in cases where authorities identify deliberate false declarations. This would maintain traceability and enforcement capability while reducing administrative burdens on both Government and legitimate operators.

Import permits for Annex B specimens

- In light of this current reform package, the stated Government goals to cut department expenditure by 15% by the end of the decade¹⁰ and the commitments to business as described above; we suggest that retention of any measures above and beyond core CITES requirements should be supported by clear, evidence-based conservation benefits.
 - The consultation document itself states reform should be “*based on best available evidence*”. **However, despite repeated requests, stakeholders have not been presented with evidence demonstrating clear conservation benefit associated with retaining import permits for Annex B specimens.**
- Maintaining Annex B import permits aligns the UK with the EU but diverges from the approach taken by all other CITES Parties. This puts the UK at a competitive disadvantage in the global market without the benefits of free movement of CITES products from the EU.
 - Export quotas set by range states are typically fulfilled through trade with other international markets, whereas UK trade is restricted.
- Despite repeated requests, no evidence has been provided which demonstrates any conservation benefit associated with the retention of import permits for Annex B specimens.
 - Since leaving the EU, the UK no longer contributes to the shared EU-level early warning system based on pooled import data, meaning UK-only data provides limited strategic value.
- Claims that UK import controls incentivise stronger Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs) in range states rely on the UK being a sufficiently influential market.
 - However, exporters have reported reluctance to trade with the UK due to increased bureaucracy and associated costs.
- Applying UK-specific NDF opinions - instead of those produced by range states - may generate diplomatic sensitivities and create a perception that the UK is questioning the assessments of other countries.
 - This approach risks undermining international collaboration and could ultimately produce negative conservation outcomes in range states.
- Continued reliance on stricter measures therefore imposes costs on Government and business - in direct contradiction to Government commitments (see above) - disadvantages UK traders internationally, provides no conservation benefit, and risks weakening international conservation partnerships.
- Removal of these stricter measures would allow for a reallocation of resources and UK expertise towards targeted capacity building in source countries.

¹⁰ [Spring Statement 2025](#)

- This approach would reduce regulatory costs on businesses and government while supporting conservation outcomes, avoiding duplication with range-state authorities, and strengthening international partnerships in source countries.
- A decision to retain the current system should therefore require a clear justification for selecting a higher-cost option over an alternative that both reduces expenditure and delivers more direct conservation benefits.

Annex 3

Examples where the stakeholder consensus was rejected

Article 10 certificates (commercial use certificates):

Options for Article 10 certificates	Number	Percentage
1. Add additional low-risk species to Annex X to better target certification burden	28	26%
2. Self-certification instead of certificates	55	51%
3. Use export or re-export permits in place of Article 10 certificates for their validity period	28	26%
4. Do nothing	30	28%

- *“The Government will seek to proceed with a combination of options 1 and 3 to reduce regulatory burden....We will not proceed with option 2 (self-certification) due to concerns over misuse, enforcement burden and inconsistent application”.*
 - We suggest that self-certification should not have been presented as an option if majority support (51%) was to be essentially ignored. Government deciding on an option with minimal support implies a pre-decided outcome which should not be the case in a government consultation.
 - Government cites inconsistent application as a reason to reject the implementation of self-certification, however inconsistency is already a feature of the current system.

Import permits for Annex B specimens.

Options for import permits for Annex B specimens	Number	Percentage
1. Create low risk species list	38	38%
2. Replace import permits with import notifications	52	51%
3. Exempt artificially propagated plants	38	38%
4. Semi complete permits for high volume, low risk trade	19	19%
5. Removal or other amendment of Annex B import permit requirement	42	42%
6. Do nothing	29	29%

- There was strong support from respondents for the removal of import permits for Annex B specimens.
 - *“We will not progress option 4 (semi-complete permits) or option 5 (removal of import permits for all Annex B specimens).”*
 - Further explanation is given as to why option 4 was not pursued, but not option 5. Despite option 5 having more support than both options 1 and 3 (both of which were adopted).
- The Government response reported *“some viewed the current system as a retained EU measure not required by CITES”*.
 - This is not an opinion, rather a fact reflected in the CITES convention text.

Semi-Complete permits

Options for semi-complete permits	Number	Percentage
1. Extend use of semi-complete permits to both imports and exports of live Annex B and C specimens	27	46%
2. Do nothing	32	54%

- *“While recognising that neither option was heavily favoured over the other, the Government will seek to amend regulations to allow the extension of semi-complete permits to cover imports and exports of live Annex B and C specimens (option 1).”*
- Reference is made to its *“future application will be subject to clear, risk-based criteria”* and *“operational flexibility for businesses engaged in sustainable, low-risk trade”*.
 - We would welcome clear and consistent guidelines regarding what constitutes sustainable and low-risk trade, to allow industry to demonstrate compliance against a defined set of guidelines.

Annex D

Options for Annex D	Number	Percentage
1. Retain Annex D, but review listed species and digitise import notifications	21	31%
2. Retain Annex D as a published list but remove the import notification requirement	9	13%
3. Remove Annex D entirely	31	46%
4. Do nothing	16	24%

- *“Some indicated that the conservation benefit provided by Annex D did not outweigh the administrative burden.”*
→ We are yet to see evidence of any conservation benefit of retaining Annex D.
- The Government response states: *“Annex D continues to provide monitoring value and removing it could weaken the UK’s ability to detect emerging trade risks.”*
→ We would welcome examples of where these measures have identified risk and averted negative conservation impacts.
- *“While some respondents supported removing Annex D, there was insufficient evidence that doing so would deliver significant benefits without creating risk.”*
→ No evidence of demonstrable conservation gains has been provided, but evidence of the benefits of removing administrative burdens were presented.

Accommodation and care considerations within the WTR

Options for accommodation and care	Number	Percentage
1. Removal of welfare assessment for Annex B specimens	39	63%
2. Do nothing	23	37%

- *“Following consideration of the consultation responses, the government will seek to proceed with option 2 and retain the welfare assessment requirement for Annex B imports at this time.”*
→ In this instance, there was clear consensus from respondents which was disregarded by the Government response.
→ Reasoning provided cites “valid concerns about the potential to create gaps in welfare protection”. Evidence was presented demonstrating the duplication of effort in welfare assessments – for example the Animal Welfare Act (2006) and The Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Act (2018).
- Concerns were raised around the welfare of invertebrates being out of scope of the Animal Welfare Act (2006) and potentially creating a legislative gap.
→ Retaining welfare assessments for annex B specimens would result in a direct conflict with one of the stated reasons for their retention *“the importance of avoiding changes that create uncertainty or unintended consequences for applicants and regulatory authorities”*.

Article 60 (A60) certificates

Options for Article 60 certificates	Number	Percentage
1. Introduce a validity period, for example 5 years	20	57%
2. Enable revocation where standards are no longer met	24	69%
3. Do nothing	10	29%

- *“The Government will not seek to proceed with option 2. Although this option had broad support from respondents, it would place an extra burden on institutions and authorities by introducing additional checks, beyond the revalidation process that option 1 would introduce. “*

Annex 4

Examples of how industry supports conservation

- Ornamental fisheries **support sustainable livelihoods** in some of the poorest and most remote regions in the world, both in freshwater ([Project Piaba](#)) and marine ([The LINI Foundation](#)) environments.
 - Such organisations protect key environments by **incentivising** sustainable use and encouraging fishers to act as stewards for local habitats.
 - UK businesses **actively engage** with these organisations – both financially and practically - to improve management practices, ensure fairer trading arrangements and provide training to promote environmentally responsible collection practices.
- OATA is also a strategic partner in the **Shoal conservation initiative**, which aims to halt extinctions and recover populations of threatened freshwater fish species.
 - Through this partnership, OATA contributes industry expertise to help ensure freshwater fisheries can support conservation outcomes alongside sustainable trade.
- More broadly, there is increasing recognition—including in the Dasgupta Review (2021)—of the importance of **industries investing in natural capital** and supporting the sustainable use of biodiversity (Roe *et al.*, 2020).
 - Conservation scientists similarly emphasise the value of approaches that **empower local communities** to manage natural resources sustainably. As opposed to the potential perception of “neo-colonialism” where Western countries attempt to shape policy in source countries (Hart *et al.*, 2020).
 - The importance of a harmonised approach to conservation - where local communities are at the centre of conservation practices – is recognised (Lovemore *et al.*, 2025)
 - The ornamental fish trade represents a clear example of a sector already delivering these outcomes through non-destructive use of biodiversity in remote regions, supporting livelihoods while contributing to conservation and public engagement with the natural world.
- The pet trade actively supports conservation through **captive breeding programs**, which can reduce pressure on wild populations and contribute to species recovery.
 - For example, seahorses have benefited from initiatives involving collaboration between UK importers, Project Seahorse, and research partners, improving understanding and conservation of both captive-bred and wild populations (ReefBuilders, 2017).

- Specialist hobbyist networks frequently support captive-breeding efforts and maintain populations of species whose natural habitats are under threat from degradation or loss (Valdez & Mandrekar., 2019; Evers, Pinnegar & Taylor., 2019).
 - The availability of specialist husbandry equipment is almost always supported by demand from private keepers, which helps make production commercially viable. This equipment is subsequently adopted by zoos and aquariums for use in their *ex situ* conservation breeding programmes.
 - Initiatives such as [Citizen Conservation](#), originally established in Germany and now more widely adopted across Europe including the UK, demonstrate how coordinated hobbyist participation supports breeding and population management of highly threatened species including the Critically Endangered toad (*Atelopus balios*) and turtle (*Cuora mccordi*).
- Beyond direct conservation activity in source countries, the pet sector contributes to **wider public engagement with biodiversity**.
 - Access to “nature in the home” may be particularly important for individuals living in urban environments without access to gardens or green space (Flies *et al.*, 2017; Lai *et al.*, 2019).
 - Aquarium keeping has been demonstrated to communicate scientific concepts informally and contribute to increased conservation awareness among hobbyists (Marchio., 2018; Maceda-Veiga *et al.*, 2016).
 - Moreover, keeping fish, reptiles, amphibians and/or invertebrates can provide an opportunity for children (or adults) with feather or fur allergies to experience the wellbeing, educational and engagement benefits associated with pet ownership that might otherwise be inaccessible to them.

In this context, reducing regulatory requirements that go beyond core CITES obligations would **create an opportunity** to redirect existing expertise and resources towards strengthening conservation partnerships in source countries, supporting community-led fisheries management, and improving supply-chain sustainability. Such an approach would align more closely with current international best practice by prioritising targeted, outcome-focused conservation interventions rather than superfluous additional domestic controls, while maintaining the UK’s strong commitment to global biodiversity conservation.

Fishing for Facts:

In 2020, OATA launched our Fishing for Facts report: an introduction to the UK ornamental fish trade to give an overview of the industry and examine a number of issues.

Wild Caught Report: The trade, the benefits, the facts:

The OATA Wild Caught Report provides a comprehensive overview of the trade in wild collected live tropical fish for aquariums. It highlights the livelihoods of fishermen in some of the world's poorest countries, the conservation benefits of the trade, and the positive impact on local environments. The report is based on robust evidence and research, aiming to dispel myths and demonstrate the positive side of the trade in wild collected tropical fish.

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