

Reflections on a changing world



**Annual
Review
2019/20**

Key facts about the industry

All these relate to live ornamental fish



**£16.2
million**

is the total value of ornamental
fish imported into the UK*



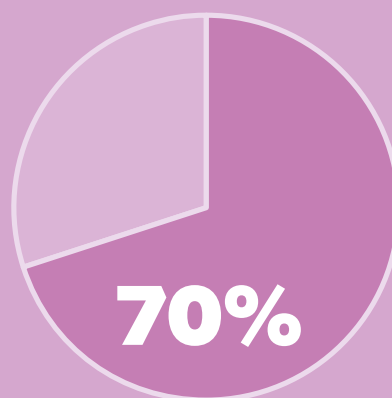
After the UK,
Germany
is the largest importer
of ornamental fish into the EU



Top five countries

to provide ornamental fish to the UK

- 1 – Singapore
- 2 – Israel
- 3 – Indonesia
- 4 – Sri Lanka
- 5 – The Netherlands



of all fish imported to the UK for our
industry come from these five countries

We import fish from

47 countries

8 are **28 countries**
in the EU provide us with our marine fish
(many of these will be caught in the wild)



*The value compared to previous years may be a reflection of the fluctuations in the exchange rate and Brexit uncertainty rather than being related to volumes of trade or the price of fish.

**In weight.

From the Chief Executive

What a year! Who knew when all the fireworks went off at the stroke of midnight on 1 January 2020 that we would see equally explosive effects on the world just a few months later.

We applaud the efforts of those essential retailers and support businesses who no doubt faced the biggest challenge in their working life when the lockdown was announced on the evening on Monday 23 March.

Overnight the UK changed and those shops and businesses had no time to prepare. Yet they did it. We also had our part to play in this by banding with our fellow trade associations to make sure the businesses who keep our pets fed and in good health were considered part of essential retail, and luckily the Government did listen.

The lockdown has had some benefits for our industry, with indoor hobbies benefiting from the extra time people have had to enjoy them. Another really pleasing outcome has been the number of ponds introduced back into gardens which should prove a boon for both wildlife and their owners in years to come.

But the world has definitely changed, although just how much is still unclear as this annual review for 2020 goes to press. But our role as a trade association stays the same. We are here to advocate and highlight the issues affecting our industry and work towards mitigating and improving them.

In this report we examine the changing world we all face in the future, from the effect of Covid-19 on the High Street and retail, to our relationship with Europe and

the wider issues in society of a growing awareness of our relationship with wildlife.

It has the feeling of a turning point but towards what is still unclear.



Dominic Whitmee

From the Chair

Speaking as an independent retailer the past few months have been incredibly challenging on many fronts. From initial concerns as to the future of my business and the industry at large it has turned out to be not only an incredibly busy time in terms of increased trade but also the extra burden upon us with the need to manage customers in a safe and practical way.

And it has also shown the importance of trade associations like OATA which are there in difficult times representing our businesses when we are all so busy just doing the day job. OATA's information and guidance throughout the crisis has given greater clarity as to what we could do within the guidelines provided by Government and ensured we could continue to trade in as safe a manner as possible.

The very fact aquatic businesses could stay operating was down to trade associations pointing out to Government that a wider range of shops should be considered essential than they first thought. And the

OATA team – who have all been working separately from home – have not stopped there. They have been interpreting and clarifying advice from Government to help our industry carry on. And keeping an eye on other issues that will affect how we do business, from calls to ban wildlife trade to plans to examine the trade in marine ornamental fish by CITES.

Also rapidly approaching us is the final transition away from Europe and this looks set to mean a lot of bureaucratic change for imports and exports which the team will no doubt explain and share to the industry as we draw closer to 1 January 2021.

It is definitely at times like this that trade associations come into their own and I hope you will all continue to show your support through membership. It is only by signing up to support trade associations that they are able to do their work to promote, protect and communicate on our behalf.

Thank you to the businesses who support OATA and I hope more will join their ranks because we will certainly need OATA's help in the coming months and years as we start to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis and transition fully away from EU membership.



Kevin Rose
Lynchford Aquatics

Covid 19

A changing retail environment

Traditional bricks and mortar retail was already said to be struggling before the unprecedented hit of the Covid-19 pandemic. Rent, rates and falling footfall were all contributing to calls to re-examine the role of the 'High Street'.

Then lockdown happened and the High Street suddenly became central again with a rapid reliance on local 'essential retailers' which, thanks to a concerted campaign by UK pet trade associations, included pet businesses. We take our hat off to those essential retailers and the businesses who supplied them who worked so hard to keep their customers happy and themselves in business during a particularly challenging time because, while welcome, continuing to trade did present very particular problems for aquatic businesses.

Despite being open, businesses could not operate as normal. After a spike in stockpiling behaviour, trade settled to largely essential items with the ability to sell other things in the shop, including livestock like fish. But social distancing put limits on customers which meant browsing – the activity which often tempts an increased spend – was no longer largely possible. Businesses also furloughed staff yet had a continuing need to maintain the rigorous routines of looking after the hundreds or thousands of fish within their shops. Cleaning, feeding and water changes had to be done along with dealing with visiting customers and ensuring they maintained social distancing rules, dealing with phone or online orders and, in many cases, setting up a home delivery service. And shops faced their usual high utility bills because they could not just switch off the lights, heaters etc to their tanks full of fish. Government support packages were just a drop in the ocean compared to these monthly bills. This all put a huge strain on small shops and their suppliers trying to keep them in stock.

So what will the 'new normal' mean for the tropical fish industry? There are signs that people are more willing to seek out local and independent businesses to support with their custom and are ready to continue to do so over the longer term. Local fish shops need to find ways to showcase and share their expertise, perhaps offering more interactive sessions and more personalised shopping experiences.



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Footfall to shops will inevitably take time to recover and many customers will have grown used to the ease and convenience of click and collect, home delivery and shopping from the comfort of their sofa. This certainly presents problems when it comes to buying and supplying live fish. Seeing live fish in a shop environment we believe is one of the best ways to showcase the sheer beauty and wonder of these creatures and enables conversations about the best care. Online only shopping presents problems with delivery because fish can't just be sent through the post. Only licensed couriers can carry live animals and these are limited.

The good weather that accompanied lockdown meant more time in the garden and anecdotally we heard that has led to the creation of more garden/wildlife ponds. In fact overall our members have told us that demand for all things aquarium-related remained high during lockdown – it was more the ability to supply this demand that suffered. Looking after an aquarium is an 'inside' hobby/interest and this seemed to prove more attractive as people were happy – or preferred – to spend increasing time within the home, and we hope that continues. But job uncertainty and talk of a UK recession will inevitably affect incomes and the continuing 'spare' money available to pursue these hobbies over the longer term is uncertain.

Almost all the tropical fish supplied to the UK come from abroad and indeed the UK is the top importer of tropical fish within the EU. More than three-quarters of those fish are tropical freshwater and come largely from Asia (such as Singapore and Malaysia), with the Czech Republic being another hub for supply. However, when planes were grounded across the globe access to cargo space disappeared and this had a significant impact on access to livestock. We are monitoring how this will continue in the future and it certainly put up the price of imports. Perhaps it presents new opportunities to create a UK market but that would require significant investment and seems unlikely to happen.

Our response

to the Coronavirus pandemic



Launched a successful campaign with other UK pet trade associations to get pet shops listed as essential retailers.



Campaigned to raise awareness on issues facing pet businesses such as high utility bills and pressure to maintain animal welfare when staff were furloughed.



Provided written submissions to various Government inquiries on how our industry was being affected by the pandemic, including Animal Welfare Committee, BEIS, Animal Welfare Network Wales & Scottish Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee.

Responded directly to official leads at BEIS & Defra on aquatic animal welfare issues.



Issued weekly email updates to OATA members.

Issued advice on travelling for work, including template letter to print out, at the start of lockdown when only essential travel was allowed.



Issued early advice to aquatic retailers on how those shops could stay open safely.



Created useful videos to explain our advice on travelling for work, tips for socially distanced selling and communicating with customers.



Shared latest advice and information on our social media channels and website.

Wildlife trade

a changing rhetoric

Trade in wildlife has long been the target of non-profit organisations which want to stop this use of wild animals and resources. For our industry, there is a trade in wild taken fish, corals and other invertebrates which are caught or harvested from the sea, or less frequently from freshwater rivers and lakes. It's not the majority of our trade – we estimate only about 5% of tropical freshwater fish (which is the largest slice of the home aquarium market) are wild caught. But for the marine side of the industry it is an important source of livestock and corals – only about 10% of this part of the market in fish is captive reared. Despite investment, a lot of research and continuing development, the pelagic nature of spawning marine fish make captive rearing much more difficult so it is unlikely this will become a major replacement option for the great variety of fish this side of the hobby currently enjoys. There is more mariculture in corals where they are raised in coral farms in the sea but even this activity has seen sudden restrictions from Governments.

Several years ago we published our *Wild Caught Ornamental Fish: the trade, the benefits, the facts* report to highlight the social good that lies behind this issue. Done well, our industry does offer people living in remote parts of the globe the chance to have sustainable livelihoods from the natural resources on their doorsteps, key elements of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. These countries often do not enjoy the societal safety nets that we do in the West so artisanal fishing to catch and supply live fish for aquariums across the world can be a small but important option to feed families.

Our fear is that this part of the story continues to be subsumed by well-funded campaigns calling for a ban on all trade in wildlife, backed up by a host of celebrities to give it some star quality. The Covid-19 pandemic offered a fresh hook to these long-standing calls, hitching a ride on global concerns about zoonoses – the jumping of diseases from animal to human. It all helped to breathe new life into the rhetoric but without any care for the consequences of this extremely broad-brush approach. Luckily there are well-respected independent institutions such as IUCN's Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Group that are working to highlight the need to take a much more nuanced approach to this issue.



Our concern remains that messages about the acceptability of sustainable use are becoming lost in the rhetoric that tars all trade in wildlife as being something without any merit.



It has undoubtedly suddenly become much harder to cut through the noise.



But the headlines and petitions that powerful NGOs are able to muster does show that industries such as ours that have an element of wildlife trade within them could face an increasingly hostile reception from customers and politicians who do not understand why wild-taken aquatic species are not inherently 'bad' but actually can offer important benefits.

Recently we have witnessed coral export bans in Indonesia, further state controls on the Hawaiian aquarium trade (one of the most well-researched in the world) and the acceptance of a proposal to examine the conservation and trade of marine fish by CITES. These illustrate that our industry is coming under an increasing scrutiny which could have huge impacts to its long-term future. We should not shy away from scrutiny, provided it is independent and led by reliable science. Our concern is always that NGOs – which have their own very particular agendas – lead these initiatives, not independent institutions. We understand UK Government ministers want to be seen to 'lead the way' in highlighting illegal wildlife trafficking. That is a laudable position to take but our concern remains that messages about the acceptability of sustainable use are becoming lost in the rhetoric that tars all trade in wildlife as being something without any merit.

This is not necessarily a new phenomenon for our industry – it's why we invested in our *Wild Caught Ornamental Fish* report in 2016 and commissioned research in 2017 into the issue of illegal cyanide fishing and how to find ways to combat it. But the opportunistic ramping up of the rhetoric on the back of the global Covid-19 pandemic is very worrying. It has undoubtedly suddenly become much harder to cut through the noise.

What we are doing

on wildlife trade



Created joint *Positive about Pets* leaflet with some UK pet trade associations and keeper groups to highlight the role all pets – including exotic pets which can be wild caught – play in the social and economic wellbeing of the UK, which was circulated to UK MPs.

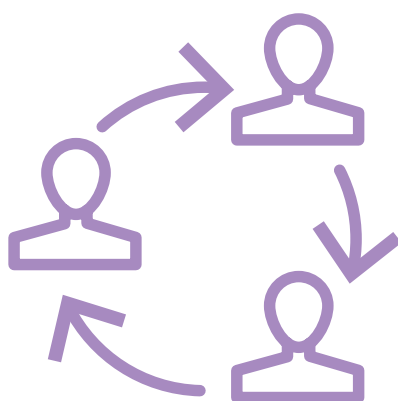
Worked with global pet trade associations to present a unified approach to CITES on the need to properly engage our sector about the marine ornamentals workshop it is planning.



Animal welfare in the UK



Launched a new report looking at the implementation of the new Animal Activities Licensing system in England to highlight key areas of concern.



Worked with the UK's Companion Animal Sector Council on Defra's review of the Animal Activities Licensing Regime, which covers pet shops, putting forward suggested changes to standards for aquatic businesses.



Met both Scottish and Welsh officials to offer support to the devolved administrations' plans to review pet shop licensing and to highlight the problems arising from the English system.



Europe

A changing relationship

We had expected our exit from the European Union to be a major focus of our work in 2020 but other events took over. Nevertheless, this has resurfaced as an important factor.

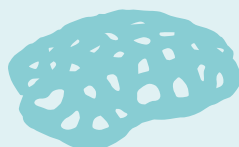
Membership of the EU has always given us a lot of work to do, particularly around how blanket EU regulations would affect the UK market. What remains to be seen is how the UK will interact with EU law going forward. We still don't know as this report goes to press despite the looming transition end deadline. Will we still mirror the requirements on many issues to ensure smooth transactions or will there be increasing divergence which could lead to more paperwork and border checks, with the inevitable increase in fees through cost-recovery?

Our role as a trade association is clear though. Our aim is always to highlight where rules could change for the benefit of our industry, for the welfare of the animals we trade in, and to help level the playing field so that UK businesses can compete effectively and fairly. We already have some ideas on this – for example allowing the sale of water hyacinth in the UK again. We argued strongly at the time that this plant cannot survive UK winters so it does not pose an invasive harm. Undoubtedly there will be a strong lobby to retain all the banned species in the UK post-Brexit so it will inevitably be a hard battle to get Defra to rethink this list.

We will also look at how we can avoid increasing problems at the border which seem inevitable as we come out of the Single Market. This is particularly important when it comes to the efficient movement of live animals through the various regulatory processes at the border because delays can impact on their welfare. We will therefore continue to lobby the UK Government to streamline and simplify border controls. As the vast majority of tropical fish coming into the UK do not present a biosecurity risk – because they could not survive in UK waters and are destined for enclosed environments (tanks) – then we believe the focus should remain on targeted action aimed at uncovering illegal trade. One particular avenue for illegal trade can be e-commerce where external selling platforms, for example in the United States and China, sell illegal products into the UK circumventing the usual commercial border checks because it comes in parcel post. Our concern is that if UK and EU law diverge then the EU becomes another source of illegal products sent through the post.



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The Government has already outlined in general terms what importing businesses can expect from January 2021 and there is a welcome staggered introduction to the changes to help businesses already beleaguered by Covid-19 issues time to get ready. But we know that all live animal movements need to go through Border Control Posts and not all points of entry into the UK have these, and some are not able to handle CITES species so we will monitor where the proposed new posts are to be built. We have also submitted detailed proposals on how the UK could simplify the CITES regime post-transition.

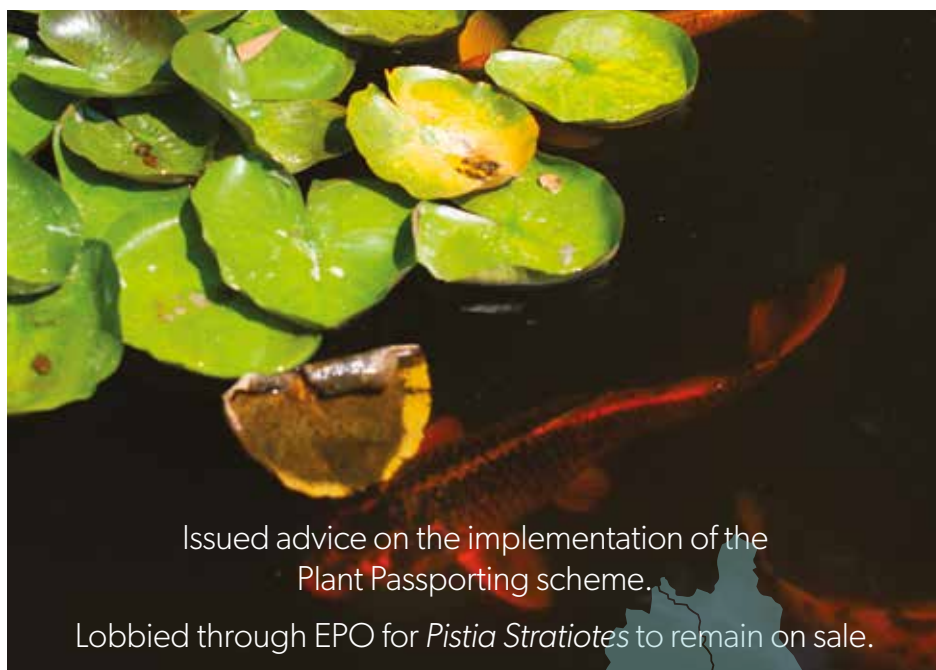
We have already lobbied the Government on the UK Global Tariff which continues to highlight strange discrepancies in import duties – for example the different tariff for tropical freshwater and marine fish, which makes no sense. The Government is also introducing a replacement to TRACES, the system which logs all imports into the UK, and we are naturally concerned that the implementation of this goes smoothly.

Much of our work over the years has focused on how EU regulations impact and affect our industry. These have been as varied as highlighting why invasive species planned for a sales ban across Europe are not an issue in the UK and seeking to clarify and provide advice on the extent to which UK businesses will have to comply with the new EU Animal Health Law. We have done this through our membership of the European Pet Organization, which brings together pet trade associations from across the continent. This has been important to ensure we still have influence in discussions about one of our most important markets.

It's hard to tell at the moment what opportunities leaving the European Union will bring for our industry. What will be of equal interest is the opportunities – and threats – that opening up new trade agreements with third countries will pose, for example, in maintaining product safety standards in aquarium products, veterinary medicines and feed. The vast majority of tropical fish imported for our industry come from outside the EU so trade outside the EU is of great importance. And with much of that arriving by air there will undoubtedly be other issues, from limited cargo space due to the Covid-19 pandemic to environmental concerns over the longer term, which we will need to monitor.

What have we done

on Europe



Lobbied the Government to reduce the tariffs on aquarium products and asked for a reduction to zero for marine fish to match that of freshwater fish.

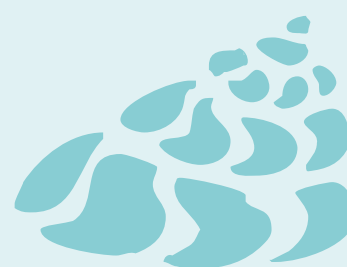


Worked with EU-based plant suppliers on ideas about how to publicise which plants cannot be sold in certain parts of Europe.

Kept industry and members up to date with 'no deal' information released by Government, setting up a Brexit hub to share relevant documents.

Worked with UK manufacturers of barley straw extract for an extension on a sales ban to enable them to sell existing products.

Issued new position statements for UK industry on the sale of mussels and snails and discouraging the sale of goldfish for cultural practices.



About OATA

We believe OATA is an organisation that punches above its weight. Our small staff of four can only achieve what they do with the support of our voluntary Board of Directors who each brings their particular industry expertise to our work.

Our Board meets four times a year and we have a programme of New Blood, offering others the chance to take a seat at the table and see what it's like to be a Board member. If this interests you then email or talk to our Office Manager Ray Valovec.



Staff

Dominic Whitmee
Chief Executive

Dr Tracey King
Assistant Chief Executive

Ray Valovec
Office Manager

Pauline Davey
PR & Parliamentary Officer (part-time)

James Allison
Aquapic Solutions

Kevin Barton
ALF (Aquatic Distributors) Ltd

Pete Carey (resigned March 2020)
Pets at Home Ltd

Robert Edgecock
Independent Aquatic Imports Ltd

Pete Smith
Aquasense (UK) Ltd

Simon Strode
Tetra

Paul West
Cranswick Pet and Aquatics
(Trading as Tropical Marine Centre)

Ben Windeatt
Pets Choice

Directors (as at July 2020)

Kevin Rose
Chair
Lynchford Aquatics Ltd

Matthew Stevenson
Vice-chair
Seneye

Mark Evenden (resigned July 2020)
Devotedly Discus Ltd

Caroline Everett
Anglo Aquatic Plants Co Ltd

Neil Hardy
Neil Hardy Aquatica Ltd

Simon Langdale
Maidenhead Aquatics @ Iver

Philip Lawton
Kidsgrove Tropicals

Ruth Low (resigned February 2020)
Gordon Low Products Ltd

David Pool
FishScience Ltd

Dr Donna Snellgrove
Mars WALTHAM

New Blood (non-voting)
Brian Schaff (TMC)
Laura Carlin (EcoMarine)

Annual General Meeting

At the time of printing, this year's AGM is planned for Wednesday 14 October 2020 at The Manor, Weston-on-the-Green, Oxfordshire, OX25 3QL. But with current social distancing requirements we are looking at alternative ways of holding this should that be necessary. Watch for updates on our website about this. All OATA members are welcome in whatever format we hold it.

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Join OATA

and feel the benefit

Strength in numbers in a changing world

In this changing world, trade associations are more important than ever. We hope we proved to be an important source of valuable help and support during recent difficult times. And it's exactly during rapidly shifting times when a collective voice is needed. Businesses like yours need to concentrate on your own work, safe in the knowledge there is an organisation looking out for your interests, highlighting the issues you face and looking out for the pitfalls and problems for the future.

We make the voices of our members heard at local, European and even global levels by representing a broad range of businesses involved in the industry. Membership support is vital to our continued success and by joining OATA businesses help to keep your industry alive and protect your own position.

Training

Inform

Support

What does OATA do for the aquatic industry?

- We lobby and challenge UK, European and world bodies/governments to make sure fish/plants/invertebrates/dry goods/medications remain available for sale.
- We offer high quality City & Guilds accredited training packages on fish-keeping for staff and individuals which are recognised by local authorities.
- We seek to promote high standards of husbandry and welfare within the industry with our Code of Conduct and free point of sale information.
- We support our members to keep up-to-date with the latest news that could affect their business through our monthly e-newsletter and the broad range of information on our website.
- We promote the hobby of fishkeeping through our online videos, social media and our work with the press.

Lobby

Promote



As a member, you benefit from:

- Practical help and support to enable you to stay ahead of the competition, including a wide range of information to help with running a small business.
- A free audit of insurance arrangements to take the hassle out of getting the best cover.
- Access to a free legal helpline.
- Membership of our Primary Authority schemes which give OATA members robust advice which they can rely on (especially helpful to small business that do not have the money or expertise to tackle some of the regulatory issues they face.) You also have a regulatory authority supporting you if challenged about the advice you are following.
- Discounts on our City & Guilds accredited fishkeeping training packages to give businesses the best-trained staff.
- Safeguarding the future of industry and your business.

Find out more about becoming a member
Visit www.ornamentalfish.org/join-us
Give us a call on 01373 301353






The voice of the ornamental fish industry

Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association Ltd


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