

BREXIT

WELFARE AND SUSTAINABILITY

ILLEGAL AND UNLICENSED TRADE

# Annual Review

## 2016/17



ORNAMENTAL  
AQUATIC TRADE  
ASSOCIATION



**OATA IS...**

the voice of the ornamental fish industry in the UK

**OATA HAS..**

more than 850 business members from shops and importers to dry goods manufacturers, wholesalers and pond consultants

**OATA SAVES...**

the industry tens of millions of pounds by fighting to keep products and fish on sale or challenging costs to the industry, like fee structures

**OATA FIGHTS...**

for its members by tackling local authorities about illegal pet traders

**OATA'S BEHIND...**

the successful AQUA show in Telford - the biggest trade show in the UK just for the aquatics industry.

**OATA OFFERS...**

two training courses to help people gain a specific fishkeeping qualification that's highly respected in the industry

**OATA'S WRITTEN...**

free care sheets and leaflets for retailers to give to customers with all the information they need to keep a wide range of fish, marine invertebrates, plants and reptiles as well as how to set up ponds and aquaria.

**OATA'S ON...**

Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn where we share info about our work and the industry as a whole



**OATA'S GOT...**

global reach by representing the UK industry at European and world meetings.



**OATA'S FILMED...**

seven 'How to' videos for people wanting some advice on how to set up freshwater and marine aquaria and to keep fish successfully.



## DIRECTORS' REPORT

*Key issues that have kept the office very busy this year have been Brexit, trying to influence Government plans to change animal establishment licensing (including pet shops) in England, commenting on the continuing issue of more pond plants being banned by Europe and stepping in to offer practical solutions to a proposal to ban the import of Asiatic species of Caudata amphibians (salamanders and newts).*

Just the matters of Brexit and licensing are huge issues that will greatly affect the way parts of our industry do business. And yet again, we see aquatic plants being disproportionately featured on EU lists for bans in the UK, without the scientific evidence to justify them. Unfortunately, this disregard for science-based decision making seems to be an increasing feature of international meetings, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). We know fish species will feature at the next CITES Conference of the Parties so we need to watch this carefully.

Luckily, we have a new Assistant Chief Executive in the OATA office. We have welcomed Dr Tracey King whose background in fish research is already proving a real asset to the team as she works on the many complicated scientific and technical issues we need to comment on.

Again we must thank all those businesses which join us as members. Without your support we can achieve nothing for the industry as we face yet another year of uncertainty.

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

*This has been my first full year as Chief Executive and I've been amazed at the breadth of issues that have come across my desk in that time. It's also been heartening to see the good relationships OATA has with a wide variety of organisations.*

I see my job as building, improving and widening those relationships through representing the industry's issues at numerous meetings with a wide range of organisations, from UK government officials, Ministers and MPs, to fellow trade associations, EU officials, NGOs and charities.

My focus this year has been looking at how we can extend our reach and reputation nationally, across Europe and globally, finding ways to represent our members' interests at all these levels. It's vital, particularly in this period of uncertainty for the UK as we approach Brexit, that we are seen as a credible and representative organisation for our industry.

In this report we have concentrated on three main areas – welfare and sustainability by promoting responsible ownership, illegal and unlicensed trade and Brexit – to show what OATA has been doing to promote and protect this industry. The industry faces most opposition over the first two areas and I believe there is a lot we can show to demonstrate how seriously we all take these issues.

**Dominic Whitmee**  
Chief Executive



**WE ASKED  
INDUSTRY THROUGH A  
SURVEY TO TELL US YOUR  
CONCERNS AND SET UP  
A SPECIAL WORKING GROUP  
AMONG OUR BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS.**



# WORKING ON OUR APPROACH TO BREXIT

*The UK leaving the European Union creates huge uncertainty and we believe it has the potential to be disproportionately worrying for smaller, more 'niche' industries such as ours where it can be difficult to get our voice heard above larger issue industries such as food, farming and fishing. However, we also see it as a good opportunity to tackle some of the issues that we have been regularly flagging up to Government departments such as Defra as we move through the process.*

We have two simple messages for the Government. These are: not to over-regulate livestock imports and to ensure domestic businesses are able to compete with foreign imports, notably in terms of product standards, by ensuring a level playing field.

Although the Government seems determined to wait until we leave the European Union we believe there is a great advantage in addressing issues

pre-Brexit because businesses are likely to find the transition hard enough. Anything that can be achieved now to remove costs and burdens to help businesses remain competitive is to be welcomed in what will no doubt be a difficult environment following our exit from the European Union. We will certainly press for early solutions, especially over issues around Border Control.

We asked industry through a survey to tell us your concerns and set up a special working group among our Board of Directors. This has helped to inform our key 'asks' when we talk to Government about the issues facing the ornamental aquatics industry as we go through Brexit. OATA members also have the opportunity to input into this debate and our negotiations.

## HERE'S WHAT WE ARE SAYING:

-  **Retain good animal health and welfare standards post-Brexit.**  
Health and welfare standards in the UK are among the highest in the world and should remain so.
-  **Retain sufficient levels of enforcement at the border to prevent illegal trade.**  
Any reduction in efforts to prevent illegal trade across the border and in the internal UK market undermines the efforts and competitiveness of legitimate businesses.
-  **Remove barriers to trade by streamlining import and export controls to facilitate trade and keep burdens and costs to a minimum.**  
This should include ensuring border clearance processes are efficient and reflect modern business practices, needs and limitations. This is very important for sectors dealing with livestock such as ours to avoid adverse impacts on animal welfare.
-  **Give equal attention to markets we import from in considering trade deals.**  
Our sector relies predominantly on imported livestock, with a (relatively) much smaller export market.
-  **Avoid reducing standards in products traded.**  
Particularly those bought over the internet which do not meet UK or European safety standards.
-  **Remove unnecessary trade bans imposed by the EU.**  
For example on species that are invasive elsewhere in the EU but which do not pose a problem in the UK, such as water hyacinth which cannot survive our winters.

HEALTH AND WELFARE STANDARDS IN THE UK ARE AMONG THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD AND SHOULD REMAIN SO.

**“I AM VERY KEEN FOR DEFRA AND THE PET SECTOR TO CONTINUE TO HAVE A STRONG PARTNERSHIP COLLABORATING ON ALL LEVELS ON VITAL MATTERS. WE MUST NOW ACCELERATE THIS WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE ANIMAL WELFARE AND TACKLE THE SPREAD OF NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES. THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET DURING INVASIVE SPECIES WEEK WAS A PRIVILEGE AND I BELIEVE THE WORK WE ARE ALL DOING IN THIS AREA IS VITAL FOR THE UK’S BIOSECURITY.”**

**Lord Gardiner**

*Parliamentary Under Secretary  
of State for Rural Affairs  
& Biosecurity Defra*



**EDUCATING  
NEW PET OWNERS  
IS THE KEY TO  
RESPONSIBLE  
OWNERSHIP**

# WORKING TO IMPROVE ANIMAL WELFARE AND ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP

*We believe our industry plays its part in promoting good welfare standards and responsible pet ownership. The whole pet industry is under the spotlight on this issue and those businesses that deal in exotic pets – such as tropical fish – face ever greater scrutiny.*


The ease of selling exotic pets online is being highlighted as a major issue by animal campaign groups which could have ramifications for the whole industry. They often cite this as the evidence that backs up their calls for a restriction on the types of pets we can sell and keep through the introduction of positive lists.

We believe that educating people to pick the right pet for their lifestyle and then care for it properly is the key to happy and healthy pets, not calls to ban certain species. We seek to promote high standards throughout the industry through our members' Code of Conduct and the free information and advice we provide to all.


We are concerned that Brexit will dominate the political agenda which could mean plans to overhaul pet shop licensing in England do not progress. This is a real opportunity to create a level playing field for all businesses which trade in live animals and tackle many of the issues we have highlighted for many years. So we are doing what we can to keep this on track. And our biggest concern remains how new regulations will be enforced with those businesses which do not invest in welfare measures, staff training and other business related matters like health and safety requirements. It's unacceptable that businesses that do invest in these are being priced out by enterprises which do not.





### WHAT WE'RE DOING...

 **The way pet shop licensing happens in England is undergoing a big change.**  
As aquatic shops are among the largest number that require a pet shop licence we have been talking to Defra to try to highlight the issues that need tackling and offering ideas on how to achieve high welfare standards. Proper training of inspectors, enforcement of mandatory conditions and how to ensure all businesses, including online, face the same level of scrutiny have been key elements of our discussion. The regulations are due to come into force in 2018.

 **We put forward an alternative solution to an EU proposal to ban the import of Asiatic species of Caudata amphibians (salamanders and newts), following an outbreak in the Netherlands which affected the wild populations of fire salamander through transmission of the BSal pathogen.**  
We argued against an import ban because we believe it would be largely ineffectual given the pathogen is already present and widespread in the wild in the EU. Our solution centred on testing and treatment of infected animals. And we were pleased that the EU Commission looked favourably on our proposal, which has provided us with a good opportunity to show we are a positive and productive partner on issues affecting our industry.

 **We have been strengthening our links with NGOs and charities to explore our shared interests in wanting to promote well-informed pet owners.**  
We need to find ways to work together where we can to amplify our shared messages. An example is our membership of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG) which is a coalition of trade, charities and welfare organisations working towards ways to improve the online selling of animals. This group is currently examining its position on exotic species being sold online so our job is make this as proportionate and reasonable as possible while still promoting better knowledge among wannabe pet owners.

 **We are working with The Pet Charity to create and populate a new Pet Portal – a go-to online resource pulling together a wealth of pet-related information for pet owners.**  
This will include all our fish-related care sheets, which will be undergoing a comprehensive review by our new Assistant Chief Executive Dr Tracey King, and our new Good Practice Guidelines. Good care information is one of the most important aspects that help pet owners keep healthy pets and all this information is free to download for retailers to hand out when they sell fish.

 **The Government has asked us to produce Good Practice Guidelines on how people can meet the welfare needs of tropical fish so we are creating a simple guide for new fish-keepers to introduce them to the wonderful world of fish-keeping.**  
The guide looks at the five welfare needs in relation to fish to help people when they set up their first tank. We are also creating new care sheets looking at how to spot diseases and are improving our water quality care sheet. We also working with a number of organisations – including hobby groups – to get their endorsement of the guide.

**IT'S VITAL  
WE ENSURE  
POLITICIANS ACROSS  
THE UK SEE THERE  
IS ANOTHER SIDE  
TO THE STORY ABOUT  
EXOTIC PETS**



**BANS ON EXOTIC  
PETS LIKE FISH  
WON'T STOP PEOPLE  
KEEPING THEM**

 **We helped to organise a visit by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Defra Lord Gardiner to Pets at Home in New Malden during National Invasive Species week.**

During his visit the Government minister saw how the store educates customers not to release non-native species into the wild when it sells tropical fish and aquatic plants. He was also shown how customers were made aware of the welfare needs of all the animals they buy. These visits are an excellent way to show politicians what really goes on when animals are sold in a pet shop.

 **During the last Parliament we met with two MPs – Sir David Amess (Southend) and Margaret Ritchie (formerly representing South Down in Northern Ireland) to discuss the issue of exotic pets and want to continue to build more connections with politicians.**

It's vital we ensure politicians across the UK see there is another side to the story about exotic pets and understand what the industry is doing to educate owners on how to care for their new pets properly.



**WE BELIEVE  
IT IS ILLEGAL  
TRAFFICKING THAT  
IS THE REAL  
PROBLEM – NOT  
HONEST TRADE.**



# WORKING TO TACKLE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING AND UNLICENSED TRADE

*We believe our industry plays its part in trying to tackle illegal wildlife trafficking. The illegal trafficking of exotic species is insupportable and we are committed to helping the authorities to fight those who choose to flout the law. But equally better enforcement is also necessary, including tackling illegal trade online. All businesses which trade in live animals should face the same scrutiny and more needs to be done to engage selling and social media sites to take down illegal or unlicensed entries.*

We believe it is illegal trafficking that is the real problem – not honest trade. Both the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2030 agree that well-managed trade in a country's natural resources can bring significant benefits, both in sustainable livelihoods and to the environment of the country of origin.

However, we have also noticed a worrying readiness, both at the 2016 CITES COP meeting and in deliberations on the EU Alien Invasive Species Regulation, to make decisions based on poor (or no) scientific evidence.

We recognise there are examples of bad practise in the global industry but equally our industry can offer people in some of the poorest countries the chance to develop a sustainable living from the resources on their doorstep. It was therefore concerning to see some fish species listed on Appendix II of CITES against the CITES Secretariat's own recommendations after little or no debate. We were pleased by the last-minute withdrawal by the European Union of its recommendation to list the Banggai Cardinal. Along with Ornamental Fish International, we did not feel other factors were given proper attention and the lack of discussion on some listings was very worrying. We do not feel this bodes well for the next CITES Conference of the Parties in 2019 when we know many more tropical fish species will be looked at.



OUR INDUSTRY  
CAN HELP MEET  
UN SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS 2030


### WHAT WE'RE DOING...

 **We joined fellow trade colleagues at a one year anniversary event in Brussels to look at what's been achieved to meet the EU's Action Plan Against Wildlife Trafficking.**

It was very encouraging to see that the EU is keen to engage with businesses to help to deliver the plan and we used the event to show that OATA and the industry can be an effective force in tackling illegal trade. We also talked to Defra separately to consider similar engagement at a UK level. We continue to work with the European Pet Organisation and Ornamental Fish International to pull together examples of where our industry plays a part in meeting action points.

 **We presented our work to the UK Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime, a Government initiative that brings regulators, NGOs and businesses together to tackle the issue.**


Our point is always we want to be part of the solution and will play our part in tackling illegal activity because it brings the reputation of our industry unfairly into disrepute. But illegal trafficking, not honest trade, is the issue and good regulation coupled with proper enforcement of the law are also important.

 **We are establishing an information-sharing agreement with the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) to give people within the industry a mechanism to report suspected illegal activity.**

At the moment there is a plethora of different UK and devolved government agencies involved in investigating illegal activity, whether that's unlicensed pet shops or selling illegal species. Visit OATA's website to see the long list of agencies involved. We believe reporting all unlicensed and illegal activity directly to one agency – such as the NWCU - will give a more coordinated approach. It should also help to shine a light on the range of issues being faced. Quantifying issues is the first step in gathering good evidence to present to Government to show where better enforcement or new regulations are needed.

**OUR  
INDUSTRY CAN  
OFFER PEOPLE IN SOME  
OF THE POOREST  
COUNTRIES THE CHANCE  
TO DEVELOP A SUSTAINABLE  
LIVING FROM THE  
RESOURCES ON THEIR  
DOORSTEP**




 **We are gathering evidence about online selling to understand what the issues are around the selling of tropical fish online.**

Animal campaign groups are focusing attention on the issue of exotic pets sold on the internet which they say leads to more of these pets ending up in rescue centres. They use this argument to push for restrictions on exotic species, known as positive lists. We have invested in a project to investigate a number of online sales platforms (such as eBay) to look at sales for tropical fish to build up a picture of how fish are sold online. Are they protected species (like CITES) without the right paperwork? Are sellers effectively an online petshop evading proper licensing? Are they giving information on care? Our plan is to report significant issues to the appropriate authorities to investigate further and use this as evidence when we lobby the Government about this issue.

 **We have commissioned an independent Government report to look at the issue of cyanide use within the marine ornamental trade.**

This illegal activity unfortunately does occur and we stand with our members in wanting to find ways to eradicate this unacceptable practice which brings the whole industry into disrepute. We asked the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) to review all the current scientific literature to see whether it is possible to find a way to detect fish caught with cyanide. Our hope is that this will inform the debate and could help those companies we know are looking at this issue.

 **Our *Wild Caught Ornamental Fish: the trade, the benefits, the facts* was highly commended in the Publication of the Year category in the Trade Association Forum's annual awards.** We continue to send this out to politicians and organisations during debates on exotic pets and sustainable development.

# JOIN OATA – AND FEEL THE BENEFIT








## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

*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 the industry alive.*

## 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 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 help 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 provide free business support services to help our members find solutions to common issues.
-  We promote the hobby of fishkeeping through our online videos, social media and our work with the press.

## 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.
-  Free helpline and document library when businesses need some advice fast on issues like HR/employment rights, health& safety, legal, tax and VAT.
-  Free HR and Health & Safety checks.
-  A free audit of insurance arrangements to take the hassle out of getting the best cover.
-  Membership of our Primary Authority schemes which give OATA members robust advice which they can rely on (especially helpful to small businesses which 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 fishkeeping training courses 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](http://WWW.ORNAMENTALFISH.ORG)  
GIVE US A CALL ON 01373 301353**

# 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 bring 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. If this interests you then email or talk to our Office Manager Ray Valovec.

## Staff

Dominic Whitmee  
Chief Executive

Dr Tracey King  
(joined November 2016)  
Assistant Chief Executive

Ray Valovec  
Office Manager

Pauline Davey  
PR & Parliamentary Officer  
(part-time)

## Directors (as at September 2017)

Ruth Low  
Chair  
Gordon Low Products Ltd

James Allison  
Aquapic Solutions

Kevin Barton  
ALF (Aquatic Distributors) Ltd

Pete Carey  
Pets at Home Ltd

Robert Edgecock  
Independent Aquatic Imports Ltd

Mark Evenden  
Devotedly Discus Ltd

Jane Flaherty  
(resigned January 2017)  
JMC Aquatics Ltd

Richard Hale  
(resigned September 2017)  
Berry Ring Herpetological and  
Aquatic Supplies Ltd

Neil Hardy  
Neil Hardy Aquatica Ltd

Simon Langdale  
Maidenhead Aquatics @ Iver

Philip Lawton  
Kidsgrove Tropicals

David Pool  
FishScience Ltd

Kevin Rose  
Lynchford Aquatics Ltd

Andrew Stagg  
(resigned April 2017)  
NT Laboratories Ltd

Matthew Stevenson  
Seneye

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

Ben Windeatt  
Pets Choice

Mark Winter  
Aqua Pacific Ltd

## New Blood (non-voting)

Barry Allday  
(stepped down July 2017)  
The Goldfish Bowl

Simon Strode  
Tetra

## Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM is being held on Wednesday 15 November 2017 at 12pm at The Manor, Weston-on-the-Green, Oxfordshire, OX25 3QL. All OATA members are welcome.

## Contact our office

By phone on 01373 301353

By email on [info@ornamentalfish.org](mailto:info@ornamentalfish.org)

By writing to OATA, Wessex House,  
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All photographs: OATA

# THE VOICE OF THE ORNAMENTAL FISH INDUSTRY

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