

# **Key facts about** our industry



c£660 million



c£432 million



Fish food, aquariums,

tank/pond equipment and accessories, plants **For every KG** of live fish imported into the UK we estimate there are



£180 of freshwater fish sales

£130 of marine fish sales

£419 of dry goods sales

£65 of aquatic plant sales



# Nearly 25 million aquatic related sales transactions a year\*





**Up 17.5%** 

79% freshwater fish \*\*\* \*\*\* \*\*\* \*\*\* \*\*\*

21% marine fish



Top five exporting countries supplying ornamental fish to the UK





importer of pet fish





Up to 4.3 million aquatic invertebrates imported

Corals, snails, molluscs and crustaceans, including shrimp, crabs, lobsters

### From the Chair

The last few years have been an absolute rollercoaster for our industry and the highs and lows look set to continue for the foreseeable future.

We have undoubtedly experienced a couple of years of increased interest and sales in both home aquariums and garden ponds, fuelled by the stay-athome status of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also put more money into some people's pockets. But now it feels like we're heading for a lull with the fallout of the rising cost-of-living crisis. We could be looking at a rebalancing back to pre-pandemic sales activity. But with businesses themselves experiencing higher running costs that is going to make it a very challenging environment in which to stay competitive, especially coupled with a customer base being extra careful with their money.

Businesses might therefore be thinking about whether to renew or join OATA as a member. This report will hopefully show why it's vital to keep supporting OATA in the work it does to both promote and protect our industry. The campaigning against elements of the pet industry just never stops. To win we need our trade association to be fighting our corner while also educating a wider audience about the progress we are taking as a membership to become net positive

To quote Winston Churchill 'United we stand. Divided we fall'.

#### Matt Stevenson Seneye Ltd



Why Seneye is an OATA member...

We have a great industry,
which through responsible stewardship is
enriching the lives of many people around the
world - be it supply chain or hobbyist. Positive
representation is ever more important when we
are up against well-funded organisations which
are opposed to the keeping of certain animals,
including ornamental fish, as pets. We must
band together through a trade association to
have that collective representation and to take
on the responsibilities that protect all our
businesses and allow us to continue to do what
we love – supporting fish keepers in their hobby.

Matthew Stevenson, Seneye, OATA Chair

## **From the Chief Executive**

We all know how great pets are – the last few years have demonstrated more than ever the emotional support and benefits to mental health they give us. That includes pet fish. We have always been clear that educating people to pick the right pet for their lifestyle and to care for it properly is the key to happy and healthy pets. Not everyone has the right lifestyle for a dog, cat or rabbit – traditionally seen as the most popular pets in the UK. But other species like pet fish – the most populous pet in the UK - might be more suited to way they live their lives.

However, it seems to get harder to get politicians to realise the importance of having a range of different pet species for people to welcome into their home. It is very worrying that the issue of positive lists – which restrict the animals that can be kept as pets – is gathering traction amongst policy makers, as has interest in policies and proposals that seek to ban access to wild collected animals like fish.

Both of these policies would considerably reduce the range of fish people could keep as pets, with corresponding impacts on the trade.

These are just some of the issues that take up our time at OATA to ensure businesses can continue to support fish keeping. There is a lot this industry already does around sustainable practices and we need to continue to show this at every opportunity. Just because a pet is 'exotic' – whatever that means – doesn't mean it is any more difficult or problematic to keep as a pet. However, ever-increasing lobbying by those opposed to keeping fish and other animals as pets, and the massive resources they have available to them, makes our job of protecting the industry more difficult. We cannot do this without your support.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our volunteer Board of Directors who put in the time and energy to support OATA's activities. We are always keen for new ideas on how we can support our industry so if your business is an OATA member and you are interested in helping, please put your name forward as a Director when nomination papers go out in the run-up to our AGM in October.

## **Dominic Whitmee Chief Executive**



## Pet fish under threat



The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic gave animal rights organisations another opportunity to call for a ban on wildlife trade. As an industry that transports non-native species into the UK, including some fish and invertebrate species collected from the wild, this rhetoric affects the very future of our trade. Wild collection is an important part of our industry and led to the publication 6 years ago of our Wild Caught Ornamental Fish: the trade, the benefits, the facts report. The report shone a light on the important benefits that wild collected livestock bring to remote communities across the globe – which was poorly recognised at the time. These are often Small Island Developing States (SIDS), UN Least Developed Countries and UN countries with Low Human Development. Catching live fish for our industry gives people in these countries the opportunity of a sustainable livelihood from the marine or freshwater resources on their doorstep and therefore offers incentives to conserve their local environment. It also contributes to meeting UN Sustainable Development Goals. Defending the industry against ill-conceived attacks by those ideologically opposed to the keeping of ornamental fish is central to our work.

#### What we did this year:



#### Proposals to ban the trade in wild caught fish

There are multiple calls from the animal rights community to ban all trade in wild collected ornamental fish. These calls are now being considered elsewhere, including by Defra in the context of its review of modern zoo standards and by the veterinary community. We have used the evidence collated evidence from both our Wild Caught Ornamental Fish report and our recent Fishing for Facts report, and more recent scientific research, to highlight the lack of evidence to support any calls for a ban and to demonstrate the benefits that wild collection can bring to some of the world's poorest communities. The size and resources of the animal rights community means that this debate will continue to present a considerable challenge for the foreseeable future.

Why
The Coral Centre
is an OATA
member...

We're specialists in our niche of this industry so I'm really pleased to know that OATA aims to defend all aspects of the aquatics trade, from fish to corals and everything in between. And I'm particularly pleased to see the work on highlighting sustainability and how the industry can and must improve on this.

Rob Peck, The Coral Centre, OATA Board Member

#### **CITES focusses on marine fishes**

In 2019, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) initiated a programme of work to review the trade in marine ornamental fish species. Whilst we welcome any open and proper debate, we are concerned that this will be used as a vehicle to seek bans on wild collected species and introduce unnecessary and burdensome controls on businesses. We have continually highlighted to CITES that its plan needs much more thought and work if the objective is to secure sustainable marine ornamental fisheries rather than ad-hoc and burdensome species listings. We still await plans on how its planned workshop will tackle this issue. In the meantime, we are working with Ornamental Fish International (OFI) and others to develop ideas for how a sustainable future for marine ornamental fisheries can be achieved at an international level. The next CITES Conference of the Parties is in November 2022.

Why
Mars WALTHAM
is an OATA
member...

Science lies at the heart of what we do at Mars so it's good to know how much work and effort OATA puts into creating robust and well-researched positions to counter some of the misconceptions about our industry.

Dr Donna Snellgrove, Mars WALTHAM, OATA Board Member,



Why
EcoMarines
is an
OATA
member...

Why
Tropical Marine
Centre
is an OATA
member...

As founding members of OATA, we always felt that

having an organised approach upholding our principles

and concerns was paramount. It's rare to see competing

So many pressures face our industry right now. It is more important than ever to me to have OATA fighting those issues and protecting my business on my behalf. We can all too easily be consumed by the daily running of our businesses without taking a look at the wider picture, OATA is there to taken the burden away. We all buy security systems for our premises, well for me OATA is the ultimate security system in fighting any industry pressures.







#### The risks of positive lists

Positive lists aim to limit the species that people can keep as pets. This is not a position we support because we believe that educating people to pick the right pet for their lifestyle and care for it properly is the key to happy and healthy pets. Not everyone can – or has the time – to keep dogs, cats or small mammals and having a wide range of pets available enables people to pick the right pet that suits their home life and pocket. A few years ago, the Scottish Government announced its intention to examine the trade in exotic pets - such as pet fish. Its new advisory body the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission launched a consultation to which we responded and has since produced an interim report which indicates a preference for positive lists as a way to tackle the perceived welfare concerns around exotic pets. We are aware that Defra is monitoring the outcomes in Scotland, potentially with a view to follow suit. We have challenged a number of assertions made around fish in its interim report and continue to advise the Scottish Government and Defra about the risks associated with pursuing this option.

#### An evidence-driven approach

A good evidence base is key to countering the misconceptions and disinformation often put forward by the animal rights community and others about our industry. So we are investing in a number of collaborations with independent organisations, including from government and academia, to examine issues from the mental health benefits of aquariums to understanding what role our industry can play in achieving net positive outcomes for nature and people and sustainability in ornamental fisheries. We are also seeking to work more closely with organisations and experts in sustainable livelihoods to amplify our messages to government, which can often be drowned out by larger and better funded animal rights' organisations.

#### In 2022-2023 we will:

- Continue to lobby against unjustified restrictions on trade, including any proposed bans on wild collection and inappropriate positive lists.
- Collaborate with the UK government, international pet trade community and CITES community to ensure a robust and well-considered approach is taken to CITES' examination of the trade in marine ornamental fishes.
- Lobby against inappropriate CITES listing proposals, such as that to list the zebra pleco (*Hypancistrus zebra*) on Appendix I.
- Build our evidence base in relation to sustainable fisheries management, livelihoods impacts and the benefits of the trade to support our lobbying activities.
- Encourage businesses and fish keepers to support the Shoal freshwater fish conservation initiative and its 'Saving Denise' campaign.





# **Welfare and Biosecurity**



We firmly believe that educating people to pick the right pet for their lifestyle and to care for it properly is the key to happy and healthy pets. And pet shops play an important part in that. From previous assessments we've made, we know that around three quarters of all pet shops licensed to sell animals sell pet fish. Pet shops can be some of the best places for fish keepers to receive all the advice they need about their new pets.

We also acknowledge that our industry deals in non-native species so we all have a responsibility to spread the message about keeping animals and plants in the right place – indoor aquariums and garden ponds.



#### What we did this year:

## **Providing high quality information and advice for businesses**

We are undertaking a comprehensive review of the information we produce for the industry, including our advice and guidance and our customer care sheets. Our care sheets are available for free for retailers to use when they sell fish and to help them meet their regulatory obligations. We are expanding our range of care sheets in consultation with industry experts and vets, which will be the widest range of free customer care information for fish available in the pet industry. We are also reviewing and updating all our advice and guidance for aquatic businesses to ensure it reflects the most up-to-date knowledge and modern standards, including our biosecurity document to help businesses ensure they operate to good biosecurity standards.

## Working with others to deliver high welfare standards

We are a member of the Companion Animal Sector Council, an independent group that works with Government to advise on the welfare needs of pets other than dogs, cats and horses. We have supported a number of its projects which aim to improve the information available to pet owners. These include the Pet Know How project, an online test to help educate prospective pet owners about their new animals, and contributing to Defra's review of the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations. Both Scotland and Wales have also introduced updated mandatory licensing regimes for pet businesses and we have supported members with advice and information to help them get ready for the new inspections.

Why Kidsgrove Tropicals is an OATA member...

It's good to know that while
we concentrate on the 'day job'
there's someone making sure that
we can carry on by having livestock,
products and kit to sell. OATA is there to give
advice on pet shop licensing if you're
struggling and can really help cut through the
'red tape' of licensing. And it offers industryspecific training packages to improve staff
know-how.

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Philip Lawton, Kidsgrove Tropicals, OATA Board Member Why
Wharf Aquatics
is an OATA
member...

Being part of OATA is like a form of insurance for your business. Their hard work behind the scenes tackles the issues affecting our trade that individual businesses like ours simply don't have the time or resources to even think about

Sean Evans, Wharf Aquatics, OATA Board Member



Why
Neil Hardy
Aquatica Ltd
is an OATA
member...

Our business has been a member of OATA since its inception 30+ years ago. With a constantly challenging business environment, it has been invaluable having the support and working with OATA in dealing with the numerous challenges and threats facing all our businesses. Without OATA the UK aquatic industry would look very different, with many fish – particularly coldwater – potentially lost to our hobby.

Neil Hardy, Neil Hardy Aquatica Ltd, OATA Board Member



## Making sure the only thing that spreads is the message

During Invasive Species Week 2022 we launched a new plant ID guide to help retailers make sure they are selling the right Milfoil plants and not illegal species. And at the request of Fish Health Inspectorate, we also issued advice to retailers to warn customers not to keep *Oryzias* species in outdoor set-ups. We also updated our guidance on how to avoid moss balls infested with non-native zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*).

We helped the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) team produce a briefing note for MPs and officials on invasive species. POSTnotes are impartial, non-partisan, and peer-reviewed briefings designed to make scientific research accessible to the UK Parliament. Our Scientific and Technical Advisor Dr Matt Bond is cited in the contributors' list.

Why
Aquapic Water
Garden Solutions
is an OATA
member...

OATA prides itself on representing all parts of the ornamental aquatic industry – including the part of the trade dealing with outdoor ponds. It's been a really important voice advocating evidence-based arguments for aquatic plants and putting its weight behind important aware-raising campaigns on invasive species which I think is really important for our industry to get behind.

James Allison, Aquapic Water Garden Solutions, OATA Board Member

#### In 2022-2023 we will:

- Launch our updated care sheets providing the most comprehensive suite of care information on ornamental fish and including new guides on ponds, marine aquariums, unheated aquariums and more.
- Launch updated advice and guidance for businesses on a wide range of issues affecting them, including new biosecurity guidance and accompanying risk assessment tool to help businesses prevent, manage and rectify the risks associated with the spread of disease and introduction of non-native species.
- Encourage aquatics retailers to adopt Pet Know How and the associated test certificates as demonstration that prospective buyers understand the basic needs of the animals they are purchasing.
- Work with CASC in proposing changes to the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations to ensure they minimise burdens on businesses whilst maintaining good welfare standards.
- Develop practical training for local authority licensing inspectors to ensure they are aware of the specific issues affecting aquatic businesses and help them better serve the businesses they inspect.
- Enhance our existing training programmes to reflect our new advice and guidance.

## Life after the EU



While our industry imports livestock from across the globe, there's no doubt that the continuing transition following Brexit continues to cause issues for those businesses which import from EU countries and who supply businesses in Northern Ireland. There is still a lot to do to ensure that bureaucracy does not overtake the ability to do business with EU countries or that it becomes too expensive for EU countries to do business with Great Britain. There are some interesting proposals in the Government's new legislative programme for the coming Parliamentary session including a Brexit Freedoms Bill which seeks to give Ministers new powers to overhaul EU laws copied over after the UK left the EU and the Electronic Trade Documents Bill to enable greater digitisation of trade-related paperwork at the border. Both cover areas we have lobbied for on behalf of our industry since exit so we are engaging

What we did this year:

and improve the situation for our sector.

#### A new border regime

In April the Government announced it was deferring new border controls and instead looking at how the movement of goods across the border could be improved, considering issues such as electronic certification and trusted trader schemes – both issues on which we have been lobbying for a number of years. We are now working with Government to explore how these objectives can be met. Along with regular meetings to address border issues, we are engaged in design workshops looking at what the new control regime will look like. We are also working with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) looking at how to simplify and streamline existing processes at the border. This is an excellent opportunity for us to highlight the issues we hear about regularly from importing members and to help improve things for the future.

with consultations to ensure we influence the outcomes

There have been significant border issues over the years at Heathrow airport, where the majority of ornamental fish arrive into the UK. Some are related to the inevitable hangover of the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted official staffing levels. We have established a sector-specific working group with APHA's borders team to identify how the situation can be improved and we were pleased when they announced plans to recruit more vets and support staff at the airport to help to speed up the release of fish consignments. But delays on custom clearances still continue so sorting out issues for our importers remains a key day-to-day job for the office team.

#### A fit-for-purpose regulatory regime

EU exit has created opportunities to change the EU regulations retained by the UK, many of which include burdensome, unnecessary and ill-targeted controls. We have engaged closely with Government seeking to streamline retained EU laws and to make them more business friendly whilst ensuring good standards are maintained. In addition to promoting 'trusted trader' schemes across multiple regulatory regimes we have lobbied for a better approach to invasive species and animal and plant health controls and substantial streamlining of CITES rules.

#### **Welcome back water hyacinth?**

We are hopeful that water hyacinth could be returning to UK ponds after the UK Government launched a review of the invasive species currently banned from sale. On leaving the EU, the UK Invasive Alien Species Regulations mirrored EU law. We have been making the case for water hyacinth to be reinstated since then because it does not pose a risk to UK waters. We are now waiting to hear the final outcome of Defra's deliberations.

Why Aquasense (UK) Ltd is an OATA member...

Our industry imports
a great deal of what is sold
in retail, whether that's livestock
or goods. As a wholesaler, having
a trade association like OATA on hand to work
on our behalf, is really important, particularly at
the moment with all the issues we're having
with the new EU border controls.

Pete Smith, Aquasense (UK) Ltd, OATA Board Member



Why
Pets at Home
is an OATA
member...

As the largest pet retailer in the UK we understand the importance of having organisations advocating on the pet industry's behalf to ensure the public and politicians understand the important part pets play in society.

Ian Paton, Pets at Home, OATA Board Member

#### In 2022-2023 we will:

- Engage with Government to simplify and streamline procedures at the border, including pursuing the introduction of electronic certification and trusted trader schemes, to enable faster movement of livestock across the border.
- Seek legislative changes to retained EU regulations that reduce burdens for businesses and ensure they are relevant to UK circumstances whilst maintaining good standards.
- Work with the European Pet Organization (EPO) to limit unnecessary restrictions on trade between the EU and UK.
- Support industry through regulatory changes and the challenges associated with increasing costs through the provision of regular advice and guidance.

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Why
Independent
Aquatic Imports Ltd
is an OATA
member...

Our business depends on being able to import and move livestock so knowing that OATA is seeking to ensure that the process of moving goods through the border is as streamlined and efficient as possible and is keeping an eye on all the controls, legislation and bureaucratic changes that could impact what we do is vital to us.

Robert Edgecock, Independent Aquatic Imports Ltd, OATA Board Member



## **Behind the scenes at OATA**

#### OATA has a small team of five people:

#### **Dominic Whitmee**

Chief Executive

Chief lobbyist and spokesperson.

#### **Dr Matthew Bond**

Scientific & Technical Adviser Responsible for ensuring OATA's work is scientifically and technically robust.

#### **Matthew Hill**

Scientific Support Officer

Responsible for undertaking research and data analytics to support our lobbying and advice.

#### Ray Valovec

Office Manager

Responsible for membership matters and keeps our Westbury office running smoothly.

#### **Pauline Davey**

PR & Parliamentary Officer (part-time)

Gets our message out there through PR, publications, website & social media as well as supporting our Chief Executive with lobbying work.

The office team is supported by our volunteer Board of Directors who each brings their particular industry expertise to our work. We are always interested in having new people join us so if you are interested in a seat at the Board table then email or talk to our Office Manager Ray Valovec to find out more.

### **Directors (as at July 2022)**

#### **Matthew Stevenson**

OATA Chair, Seneye

#### **Pete Carey**

OATA Vice-Chair, CASCO

#### **James Allison**

Aquapic Water Garden Solutions

#### **Laura Carlin**

**EcoMarines** 

#### **Robert Edgecock**

Independent Aquatic Imports Ltd

#### **Sean Evans**

Wharf Aquatics

#### **Caroline Everett**

Anglo Aquatic Plants Co Ltd

#### **Neil Hardy**

Neil Hardy Aquatica Ltd

#### **Simon Langdale**

Maidenhead Aquatics @ Iver

#### **Philip Lawton**

Kidsgrove Tropicals

#### **lan Paton**

Pets at Home

#### **Rob Peck**

The Coral Centre

#### **Brian Schaff**

Tropical Marine Centre

#### **Pete Smith**

Aquasense (UK) Ltd

#### **Dr Donna Sneligrove**

Mars WALTHAM

#### **Ben Windeatt**

Pets Choice

Why
Maidenhead
Aquatics
is an OATA
member...

It's reassuring to know that we have an effective and well-regarded organisation watching out for us. Our business specialises in ornamental aquatics so being a member of a specialist trade association which concentrates just on this part of the pet industry is very important to us.

Simon Langdale, Maidenhead Aquatics, OATA Board Member



ensuring access to the fish, invertebrates and plants to put into tanks and ponds then any manufacturer or support service business within the aquatics industry couldn't operate.

Pete Carey, CASCO, OATA Vice-Chair

#### **Annual General Meeting**

The AGM is on Wednesday 5 October 2022 and all OATA members will be invited to attend.

#### **Contact our office**

By phone on 01373 301353
By email on info@ornamentalfish.org
By writing to OATA, Wessex House,
40 Station Road, Westbury,
Wiltshire, BA13 3JN



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# Have you joined OATA?

Fish are the most populous pet in the UK yet probably the least recognised. We know how great pet fish are and we're here to help our industry shout about the benefits of the ornamental aquatic trade and how we all support people who keep pet fish.

**OATA was set up in 1991** and throughout that time we have represented the whole industry – from **importers**, **manufacturers** and **wholesalers** to **retailers** and **pond and aquarium consultants**. Our aim is to:

- Enhance the reputation and promote confidence in the industry
- Set high standards for the industry to follow
- Provide good education, training and information
- Represent the views of our members to elected representatives and officials and work collaboratively with them
- Work with other trade bodies and relevant organisations to build a stronger voice for the pet industry
- Promote the benefits that pets like fish can bring to society both at home and abroad
- Encourage responsible ownership and enjoyment among people who keep fish

#### We're here to...

- Secure your future our job is to promote and protect the industry to ensure you can continue to sell livestock and equipment. We have a direct line to influence decision makers like UK Government Ministers and officials, and we seek to influence EU and global bodies through our membership of Ornamental Fish International (OFI), the European Pet Organization (EPO) and the International Pet Advisory Council (IPAC)
- Provide information, advice and guidance for your business:
  - Our Primary Authority Assured Advice gives you confidence in your dealings with local authorities
  - Our member-only guidance helps you comply with the law.
  - Our annual trade statistics reports give you valuable market information.
- Save you money over the past 30 years OATA's work has saved the industry more than £250 million by protecting species from sales bans, lobbying on fees and minimising the burdens of regulatory controls on our industry.

#### Did you know?

- In 1994 OATA stopped a ban on cold water fish imports
- In 1998 OATA halted a ban on owning sturgeor
- In 2013 OATA protected the sales of 3 top-selling aquatic plants after Defra banned five other invasive pond plants
- In 2016 OATA published its Wild Caught Fish: the trade, the benefits, the facts report to shine a light on the benefits of wild collected species.
- In 2016 OATA commissioned research from Cefas on cyanide use in the marine ornamental trade to help tackle this illegal practice
- In 2020 OATA played a central role at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in securing essential status for pet businesses to enable them to stay open
- In 2021 OATA published its Fishing for Facts report to tackle misconceptions about the industry

Why
Pets Choice
is an OATA
member...

Our pets play an important role in society and we need trade associations like OATA to be

highlighting that message, whether through helping to educate fish keepers with good quality care information, working in partnership with other organisations like The Pet Charity or letting politicians know why it's important to have a range of pets available for owners to share their homes with.

**Ben Windeatt, Pets Choice, OATA Board Member** 

Join OATA today to help protect your business for the future!
Visit www.ornamentalfish.org/join-us

Visit www.ornamentalfish.org/join-us Give us a call on 01373 301353

A company limited by guarantee and registered in England No. 2738119 Registered office: Wessex House, 40 Station Road, Westbury, Wiltshire, BA13 3JN



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