



## **A ban on commercial third party sales of puppies and kittens in England: call for evidence March 2018**

Written submission from Dominic Whitmee, Chief Executive of the Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association

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The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) represents more than 850 UK businesses which provide fish-keepers with everything they need to set up and maintain a successful home aquarium or garden pond, including retailers, breeders, importers and manufacturers, many of which are SMEs. We promote high welfare standards in the industry through a wide variety of initiatives, such as our Code of Conduct, customer care sheets and our Primary Authority scheme for pet shops.

It is not completely clear in this call for evidence whether the term 'pet' is only defined as relating to puppies and kittens (or adult dogs and cats). We are concerned by Parts 4 & 5 which seems to extend the definition of 'pet' by asking whether a ban on third party sales should be extended and mentions 'other types of pets' (4) and 'any ban on third party sales in England' (5).

In 2016 OATA carried out a Freedom of Information request to UK local authorities to examine their licensing of pet shops. This revealed that more than three quarters (77%) of pet shops sell fish. Both coldwater and tropical fish, whether freshwater or marine, are largely imported into this country from overseas and sold in aquatic shops. **Therefore sales of ornamental fish in pet shops will be a third party sale. Fish are also the UK's most populous pet. So any initiative that questions the third party sales of pets is of great concern to us which is why we are responding to this call for evidence.**

We estimate that across the UK:

- There are 3,000 pet shops of which more than two-thirds will sell fish
- 4 million households own fish (that's 14% of the population).
- There are 100+million fish kept in aquariums and ponds (making fish the most populous pet).
- Fishkeepers spend £400 million a year on their hobby while pet owners in general spend around £6 billion a year on their pets (that's all pets) including foods, accessories and veterinary care.
- That generates taxes of more than £2 billion annually.
- 50,000 people are employed by the pet industry within the UK (we estimate around 12,000 are employed by aquatic-related businesses).
- Pets are good for our health and are estimated to save the NHS at least £2.45 billion every year (which could be a conservative estimate). Therefore the benefits of pet ownership in general, in terms of tax generated and NHS spending spared, is about £4.45 billion a year.

Any attempt to ban third party sales of ornamental aquatic species would have a hugely negative impact on the whole of our industry, including for example the aquarium and kit manufacturers, dry goods businesses, wholesalers, importers and transporters. It is not hyperbolic to say it would close down our industry completely, because there just would not be enough fish sales without shops, with the resultant loss of jobs, tax and revenue to the UK economy, to say nothing of the health and social benefits that derive from having a pet fish.

**We therefore wholly oppose any proposal to ban the third party sale of ornamental aquatic species.**

We are also particularly concerned by any characterisation of pet shops as places that do not provide good care and welfare to the animals in which they trade. Local authority licensing requires them to invest in staff training and our members strive to provide excellent care to the animals they sell, supported by high standards of advice provided by trade associations such as ours. Furthermore, they seek to provide the best care information and advice to their customers on the care and keeping of the animals purchased.

We would also offer some observations on the call for evidence as a whole:

- We would question whether banning the sale of animals such as puppies and kittens from pet shops and only allowing sales by breeders or rescue/rehoming organisations is genuinely a better option.

Unlike pet shops which require a local authority issued licence to operate, rehoming/rescue centres are not licensed so have no external, independent inspection scrutiny at all. This will not change with the new Animal Activities Licensing regime due to come into effect in October 2018. Pet shops are additionally open to the public (and therefore open to public scrutiny through daily footfall) in a way that rehoming/rescue centres are not. This proposal will not stop people setting themselves up as a rehoming centre to get around the ban and who will then fall outside any regulatory control.

- Bans rarely achieve what they intend because of a lack of enforcement.

The vast majority of these animal sales originate online – not in pet shops. Our experience of sales bans in other areas, eg aquatic plants and invertebrates such as Apple Snails, is that whilst a ban may be in place, the enforcement agencies rarely have the time, interest or inclination to enforce these bans, particularly when it comes to online sellers. It certainly seems to us that closed Facebook groups for example fall into the ‘too hard to pursue’ category when we report infringements. And when all it takes is a trip across the border to Scotland or Wales then, in practice, how would any such ban on third party sellers in England really be enforceable?

It is our view that this proposal has not been well considered nor thought through and is perhaps simply a political reaction to a poorly evidenced call for action.