



**St Helena Government**  
Agriculture and Natural Resources Division  
**BIOSECURITY**

## **Guidelines for importers of live ornamental fish**

### **WHY DO WE CONTROL THE IMPORTATION OF LIVE FISH?**

The importation of fish is not prohibited – just controlled – and for a surprising number of good reasons. Because of this, since the 1944 Animal (Diseases) Ordinance, it has been a legal requirement to obtain a licence before importing live fish. But why?

#### **DISEASE CONTROL:**

There are a host of fish diseases which can come both with the fish and in the water. We wish to protect the fish collections of islanders from new diseases, thus safeguarding their investment. Fish tend to be swapped around from pond to pond or tank to tank, and experience tells us too that it is not uncommon for fish owners who find a fish has outgrown the pond or tank to release it in a reservoir. Not, of course, something we recommend!

But to safeguard your investment, and the fish on the island, please quiz the retailer about the health of the fish. It is impossible for us to say they are disease free, but try to get some reassurances that convince you his stock is healthy.

Remember - if the fish turn up at the wharf diseased, we will have no choice but to confiscate the fish and humanely destroy them.

#### **WILD OR CAPTIVE:**

Some species of fish are endangered but highly collectable, and are poached by unscrupulous traders who then sell their catch to retailers. This is why we ask for two pieces of information: the proper Latin name – and the shop owner should be able to give this to you; and whether the fish is wild caught or captive bred.

The selling of wild caught fish should only occur under a strict licence, otherwise you can not know if it is from a sustainable source, disease free, or even legal. Some fish species are CITES listed (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and their possession can get you into trouble with the law.

#### **OTHER PESTS:**

The fish come in their own world, the world of water. Unfortunately they may not be alone. The water can contain fish parasites, snail eggs, mosquito and midge larvae, and a range of plant seeds, to name a few.

A common snail for example is the spreader of liver fluke; another, bilharzia - both diseases of man. Certain mosquitoes spread malaria, certain midges diseases like Blue Tongue. Worldwide a number of invasive water weeds are causing havoc choking waterways and reservoirs after being accidentally introduced.

We can't eliminate all risk, but for this reason a condition of your licence is that you bring in no pondweed, and that the water is clean. When you purchase the fish, be sure to ask the retailer for fresh clean water, not the bottom of the tank. We also request that you change all the water once before arrival in St Helena. Beware of cold shocking the fish, and beware of tap water. We recommend you use bottled spring water (not carbonated!). Bring it up to the exact same temperature as the fish water in an open container to allow the water to oxygenate. If you half empty the bottle, cap it, and shake it vigorously, it will help to oxygenate the water. When the water is right, you can transfer the fish.

### **COLD WATER OR TROPICAL:**

Believe it or not, even fish have rights! It is one thing to kill and eat a fish, but another altogether to knowingly keep it in such conditions that it is tortured slowly to death.

A common misunderstanding is mixing tropical fish with coldwater fish. Guppies, mollies and plecos, for example need water that is around 24° to 27° centigrade, whereas goldfish such as fantails, comets and shubunkins should be in water that is 17 to 23° centigrade. They are not compatible; they should not be mixed. By all means bring both in, but have a heater for the tropicals and keep them separate.

Don't be seduced by their attractive appearance. Know what you are buying for. Is it a heated tropical fish tank, or an outdoor pond? If you're not sure what the fish requires, ask the shop owner. They are sometimes too eager to sell their fish and not so eager to tell you how to keep them.

### **YOUR CHECKLIST:**

- Does the shop look reputable and well kept?
- Can the supplier give you some assurances that his stock is healthy?
- Do the fish look OK? Are they swimming freely and upright, are their fins intact or eaten away, does the skin look shiny and colourful or is it blotchy and dull, with red sores or fluffy ulcers (fungal growths)?
- Are they tropical or coldwater?
- What are their common names and scientific names?
- Is the water you are given clean and free of debris and pondweed?
- Have you got the right equipment and feed to keep them?
- Have you filled in your application form for a licence to import?
- Have you received a licence to import?

Further information can be obtained from:

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