

## **AN OPEN LETTER TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL GOVERNING BODIES REGARDING NGO CALLS TO END LIVE ANIMAL TRADE IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

As leaders for the global pet trade and live animal keeping communities, we write to express our alarm at the campaigns being conducted by many NGOs calling for blanket bans on wildlife trade in all its forms. We believe these organisations are using the unease surrounding the current Covid-19 crisis to pursue long-standing political agendas to close down the wildlife trade, based on an ideological opposition to the use and keeping of any animals rather than any evidence of a link between the current pandemic and the legal pet trade, and without a science- or evidence-based understanding of the complexity of that trade or the global consequences that could ensue.

**We urge those national and international bodies governing the trade of live animals to resist calls for the elimination of the wildlife trade and instead rely on sound science, good regulation and robust enforcement to prevent the spread of disease.**

These NGO campaigns are in direct contradiction to the considered, well-researched and evidence-based arguments presented by independent science-based institutions such as, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the Oxford Martin Programme on the Illegal Wildlife Trade. These organisations have clearly outlined the case for the continued legal and sustainable use of wildlife and of the unintended consequences for wildlife that might occur if campaigns like these go unchallenged.

Indiscriminate and broad ranging bans would have a significant negative impact on the responsible pet and animal-keeping communities. For centuries, we have shared our lives with a wide variety of species, from dogs and cats to goldfish and geckos. Live animals for the pet trade have moved between countries successfully for decades under a heavily regulated and continuously evaluated system that protects both human and animal health. Research shows that pet companionship improves human health and mental well-being (incredibly important during the current lockdowns forcing global social isolation), brings a direct connection with nature right into our homes for us and our children in this increasingly urbanised world, helping to develop a greater compassion for animals and a better understanding of the natural world, and contributes significantly to our national economies. Whether it be a mainstream pet like a dog or cat, or a specialized species like tropical fish, snakes and spiders, pet keepers and the pet care community that brings them together readily acknowledge the need to source and care for these companions responsibly and legally.

Like many, we want to end the unsustainable use and illegal trafficking of wildlife. Unsustainable and illegal practices that are harmful to biodiversity taint and demonise the reputation of those who work sustainably and legitimately. We support the development of stronger policies and increased enforcement action across the world to tackle these issues. But these key challenges are being marginalised by these unrealistic calls for blanket bans.

We should all want to work together to deliver changes that can result in long-lasting and effective change for the better. We should all be seeking to improve the regulation and enforcement of wildlife trade, with a focus on human public health and animal welfare to minimise the risk of zoonotic transmissions, and to reduce human-induced habitat degradation and fragmentation in order to preserve biodiversity worldwide. We should also

be conscious of the need to preserve the livelihoods of the many millions of people who make a living through the legitimate trade in live animals, especially those living in parts of the world without the societal safety nets enjoyed by many of us in the West (where these arguments for bans often originate).

We the undersigned stand ready to work collaboratively with governments, NGOs and other stakeholder communities to identify realistic, scientifically supportable and evidence-based solutions to reduce unsafe, illegal and unsustainable use while supporting sustainable and well-managed trade in wild resources – all central components of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



**Svein A. Fosså, President, EPO**

Created in Vienna in April 1990, the European Pet Organization (EPO) is a coalition of parties interested in protecting and promoting the interests of the European pet industry. Representing the voice of the pet sector in Europe, EPO represents ten (10) trade associations in ten (10) countries representing thousands of enterprises many of which are SME's or micro businesses.



**Dominic Whitmee, Chief Executive, OATA (UK)**

The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) represents the interests of over 850 UK members which span the entire home aquarium supply chain from importers, wholesalers, growers, retailers and manufacturers, many of whom are SMEs or microbusinesses. The home aquarium sector contributes £400 million per year to the UK economy and employs 12,000 people



**Craig Brummell, Chairman of the Board, PIJAC Canada (CA)**

The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council of Canada (PIJAC) provides leadership and communication between all sectors of the pet industry through resources, training, and advocacy to promote the highest level of pet care. The association represents over 1500 businesses, promoting collaboration and the development of standards to support Canada's 9 billion dollar industry and the success of pet families everywhere.



**Mike Bober, President and CEO, Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) (US)**

Founded in 1971, PIJAC serves as the legislative and regulatory voice of the responsible pet care community in the United States, working to promote animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, foster environmental stewardship, and ensure the availability of healthy pets.



**Shane Willis, President, OFI**

Ornamental Fish International (OFI) is the peak international trade association representing the ornamental fish industry since its inception in 1980. OFI represents members from more than 30 countries around the world and include members from all sectors of the industry (producers, exporters, importers and retailers) as well as a number of NGO's and other trade associations. OFI represents and promotes the interests of the industry through lobbying to various institutions around the world; as well as educating industry and hobbyists in responsible and sustainable Best Practices. In 2017, OFI members have adopted its new charter guaranteeing the conduct of an ethical, fair and legal trade.



**Chris Newman, Chief Executive, REPTA (UK)**

The Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association (REPTA) represents the interest of the specialist trade in reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates in the UK across all business sectors from importers, wholesalers, retailers, and breeders. The exotic pet trade in the UK contributes in excess of £350 million per year to the UK economy annually.

**Sustainable  
Users  
Network**

**Dr Jim Collins, Coordinator, SUN (UK)**

The Sustainable Users Network (SUN) is an umbrella organisation for affiliated associations with a broad interest in trade and keeping of non-domesticated animal species and of the trade and growing of plants. Membership ranges from large organisations like the National Council for Aviculture, Hawk Board and Royal Horticultural Society through to a host of small specialist societies.



**Adolfo Santa-Olalla, President of the Live Animal Commission of AEDPAC (ES)**

Asociación Española de la Industria y el Comercio del Sector Animal de la Compañía (AEDPAC) brings together the main importers, manufacturers and distributors of products for Company Animals that operate in the Spanish market. Its objective is to promote and promote the industry and commerce of the pet industry; products and accessories, food, services, equipment and animal health products.



**Svein A. Fosså, Secretary General, NZB (NO)**

The Norwegian Pet Trade Association (NZB), founded in 1978, has a total of 160 business members, thereunder manufacturers, importers, wholesalers, and retailers; all relying on the continued trade in live pet- and hobby animals.



**Dr. Gerrit Hofstra, Deputy Secretary, DIBEVO (NL)**

Dieren Benodigdheden en Voeders (DIBEVO) is the Dutch industry organization representing all industry operators from the pet sector in the Netherlands covering dry-good manufacturers and live animal trade, wholesalers, exporters, importers along with pet stores, garden centers with “animal” departments, and animal care companies (i.e. animal guesthouses and grooming salons).



**René Michaux, President. PRODAF (FR)**

**Olivier Dominikowski, President of the PRODAF Commission on Traceability and Animal Welfare, PRODAF**

Syndicat professionnel des métiers et services de l'animal familial (PRODAF) is the French union promoting in France a sustainable pet trade sector and its directly linked stakeholder s- companies and their respective employees – with a continuous concern for animal welfare. PRODAF brings together and represents French distributors (pet shops, garden centers), breeders, dog, feline and exotic pets professionals, groomers, manufacturers, wholesalers, importers, training centers.



**Kurt Essmann, Chairman, WKO (AT)**

The Association of Austrian pet traders is part of the Federal E-Commerce, Mail Order and General Trade Association based in the Federal Economic Chamber of Austria (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich (WKO)).



**Norbert Holthenrich, President, ZZF (DE)**

**Dr. Stefan Hetz, Specialist for pets and international relations,  
ZZF**

Zentralverband Zoologischer Fachbetriebe Deutschlands e.V. (ZZF) is the German Pet Trade & Industry Association (ZZF). Founded in 1947, ZZF represents the professional, economic and socio-political interests of the whole German pet industry. The members include firms and system headquarters in the pet supplies trade, wholesale companies, grooming salons, wholesalers and breeders of pets and the pet food and supplies industry. ZZF is committed to the responsible handling of pets and has set itself the goal of actively showing the public, media, politics etc. the positive effects of keeping pets according to animal welfare. The service company of ZZF, Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft Zoologischer Fachbetriebe GmbH (WZF), as publisher and organizer of the INTERZOO, the largest international trade fair for pet supplies, plays a prominent role in the international pet industry.