



Sahabat Alam Malaysia **Friends of the Earth Malaysia**

For Environmental Justice

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Letter to Editor

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Need to stop the mistreatment of fish kept as pets

Disturbing pictures of betta fish bred in unacceptable breeding conditions in massive farms in Thailand exposes the dark side of the pet fish industry. Much in demand for their bright colours and beautiful fins, fish, unlike dogs and other furry and feathered pets, do not develop separation anxiety or destructive behaviours when left alone; they are completely silent, not a sound, ever.

People keeping fish as pets have no thought for their wellbeing and are indifferent to how much pain and suffering the fish endure before ending up on display. Often regarded as non-beings they are sold as commodities, kept in unsuitable ways and in unsuitable places, and suffering distress and physical abuse in plastic bags, bottles or featureless tanks.

The exposure of the filth, suffering, and widespread neglect of bettas in Thai fish farms by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is truly an eye opener. These sensitive fish suffer greatly in the pet trade where they suffer from the time they are born on breeding farms to their destination at the pet stores.

PETA's investigations of the pet fish industry in South East Asia and Thailand, one of the top global exporters, have uncovered appalling neglect of betta fish and extreme suffering. PETA eye-witness found rotting fish in breeding tanks and others suffocating or wounded. Those that died were tossed on the floor to rot while the injured were released in a waste pond. Inside the breeding factories, thousands of fish were then individually isolated and put into bottles and packed together tightly. They are then tranquilized so that the fish do not eat their own tails and transported without food for days. Industry insiders have confirmed that this system is common practice for retailers.

Fish are cruelly transported from dealers to pet stores without enough water to keep bodies submerged or in plastic cups containing a couple of inches of water. The reason being Asian suppliers try to reduce the volume of water with their animals to save on shipping costs to appease US wholesalers and suppliers.

In many Malaysian homes, fish are often kept in small tanks, jars and bottles. This becomes a serious welfare problem for a number of reasons. Firstly, the water will rapidly become toxic as the available oxygen is quickly consumed and ammonia accumulates from the fish's waste. Small tanks and bottles do not provide sufficient space for exercise or behavioural stimulation, both of which are fundamental in providing a healthy and stress-free environment. Aquariums are often left in a neglected state with fish suffocating due to faulty pumps and a buildup of algae.

People who buy fish (or any animals!) from pet stores are supporting a heartless business that treats animals like toys or inanimate objects.

The pet and aquarium industry must take action to resolve these issues immediately, or simply stop the sale of these unique creatures. They have a responsibility to educate the public on the proper care of fish and lead by example. This includes stopping the sale of inappropriate tanks/housing and keeping betta fish in plastic bags and bottles.

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