

P-05-933 Ban Goldfish from being given away at funfairs. #OperationGoldfish, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 29.01.20

Having a passion for animals and a career working with animals it is imperative to me that any animal, big or small, is cared for and given the best quality of life. I work in a pet shop as a qualified freshwater aquatics specialist. This has allowed me to build up a high level of knowledge about how to correctly care for all types of fish. There are many myths surrounding the care of Goldfish, such as they can live in a small bowl, they have a short life span and they are easy pets to look after.

In fact, if correctly cared for **Goldfish should live for 25 years**, they require a tank of at least 100 litres and have complex needs, which require “a great deal of preparation, investment, time and care”. (Please see document 1 - RSPCA report, page 3, paragraph 2 – “Tank size”, Page 4 and 5 “RSPCA guide to caring for Goldfish”)

My shop is near a popular funfair which gives away Goldfish as prizes. What was alarming to me is that on a regular occurrence people who had just won a Goldfish on impulse, were visiting the shop seeking advice and more information. After hearing advice from my shop, many of the members of public were not prepared to spend the amount of time and money to provide adequate care for the Goldfish.

I then decided to investigate this further and visited Barry Island funfair, where I was alarmed to find that the information leaflet which was given out with the ‘prize’ was incorrect. This leaflet is produced by a third party who solely sell fish products and not live fish. (Please see document 2 – “Waterlife Goldfish Guide”)

Funfair leaflet point 2 “What size tank do I need” states that “without a filter...”, however every fish tank requires a filter to ensure that the water is kept clean (Please see document 1 –Page 5 “RSPCA guide to caring for Goldfish”). The funfair leaflet also states “The traditional goldfish bowl is really only big enough for one goldfish, a better option would be a 45 litre aquarium”. Again, this is incorrect as one goldfish requires at least 100 litres. When the Goldfish is won at the funfair the fish is handed over in a plastic bag; a tank which is only approximately 5 litres in size can be purchased from them for an additional £5, however this is not compulsory.

Funfair leaflet point 4 – “you need to set up your tank for a couple of days before adding your Goldfish”. Although this is partially correct, the Goldfish are usually won on impulse and therefore the likelihood of the tank being set up prior to their visit is unlikely. (Please see Document 1 - Page 5 “RSPCA guide to caring for Goldfish” and cover page). The RSPCA strongly advise new owners to set up their tank at least two weeks before adding in any fish and therefore **the ownership of a Goldfish requires more thought and preparation than an impulse win at a fair.**

Barry Island attracts lots of visitors who can travel far for a day out. If this animal is won on impulse, how is the welfare looked after as it could remain in a bag, in warm conditions for the remainder of the day and also possibly face a long journey home. On many occasions as the animal is won on impulse the new owner is not prepared or equipped to look after this animal correctly. Barry Island is only one example of where this is happening and this needs to be stopped. (Please see document 1 - RSPCA case studies)

I am not trying to stop people owning Goldfish as pets, as if they are ready to own a Goldfish then they would visit a pet shop where they make a pre-planned purchase. Pet shops have regulations and have qualified specialists who will offer all the support and advice that the new owner requires.

As this campaign has developed, I have received endless amount of support from the general public. I was surprised at the amount of people I have spoken to who were shocked that this archaic tradition still goes ahead. I have received feedback and comments such as "if puppies and kittens were given away as prizes this would have been stopped years ago".

The operation goldfish campaign has been featured on the BBC news, radio stations and local newspapers. This has resulted in professionals such as Tom Hird, a marine biologist contacting the BBC giving 100% support to the campaign. Please see some of the quotes form Tom Hird's interview (The interview is on BBC archive and a copy can also be obtained from me directly):

"They have been abused for many, many years"

"Winning a goldfish in a bag it would be like winning a puppy in a suitcase"

"They have feelings, they get stressed, they have friends....and need to be treated with respect"

"Lack of understanding of the animal"

"They are not an easy fish to keep and you managing to get one, to two or three years old....is not an achievement"

"They are living creatures and need proper care the same as any other living creature....just because it's a fish doesn't mean it's any less of a responsibility".

The story which was broadcast on the BBC news features myself and also Paul Tapley, the Maidenhead aquatics Welfare Officer who also strongly supports the campaign. (Please see link for the full video clip: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-49473624>). Since the BBC interview Paul has also been in touch to provide the below quote in support of the petition:

"It's true to say there's a long tradition of goldfish as pets and for many of us, these are our first experience of keeping fish. The main issue is that fishes are entirely reliant on their environment to thrive, in a way that stands apart from mammals, birds and other companion animals.

Fresh tap water contains chlorine and dissolved gases that are harmful, which means that without the use of water conditioners and time it's difficult to cater for a goldfish as an unexpected new pet. **Retailers spend hours advising customers to prepare their facilities in advance and the fact that so few people are surprised to hear that goldfish should live for decades is a testament to how culturally ingrained this low-level animal abuse is".**

The publicity of the campaign has resulted in an overwhelming amount of support from the general public. After the BBC news report aired the RSPCA then contacted me directly and I have since been working with them and attending Council meetings to introduce the ban on Council land.

We are making a step in the right direction and it has been great to see Conwy and Wrexham Council joining Caerphilly and Newport Council in passing a ban to give animals as prizes on Council land. Within the Scotland Animal Health and Welfare Act 2006, it is an offence to give an animal as a prize. This is a movement which is building up momentum with Councillors, organisations and most importantly the general public.

We have a duty to do more to help protect Goldfish and I believe up until now, Goldfish have been overlooked. There are other Animal acts in place which restricts and regulates areas such as puppy farming and the use of wild animals in circuses. I agree with the proposal for the animal licences, as it will have great benefits for animals in Wales, however I don't feel that it will provide adequate protection for the welfare of fish.

We are living in a society where we should stand up for what is right, and all animals deserve a good quality of life. **Should winning a living animal as a prize, merely to satisfy us be a strong enough reason to let this continue?**

With your help in passing this ban we can ensure that no more goldfish need to go through pain, just for an outdated tradition to continue.