

Managing the biosecurity risk of ornamental aquarium fish in Queensland



Pearl cichlid (*Geophagus brasiliensis*)



Jaguar cichlid (*Parachromis managuensis*)



Silver arowana (*Osteoglossum bicirrhosum*)



Delhezi bichir (*Polypterus delhezi*)

The keeping of freshwater ornamental fish and invertebrates is a hobby enjoyed by many Queenslanders. Australia-wide, the hobby supports a \$350 million industry of growers (aquaculture and breeders), importers, wholesalers and retailers. The ornamental fish industry now includes over 1000 species of which 8 to 10 million are imported into Australia annually. In recent years, there has also been an upsurge in the keeping of freshwater invertebrates (including molluscs and crustaceans).

The biosecurity risks associated with ornamental fish and invertebrates broadly includes the:

- accidental or intentional release of any fish or invertebrates into our environment
- introduction of exotic pathogens (viruses and bacteria) and parasites into Australia (including the environment and aquarium or aquaculture industries) via fish or invertebrates or the water in which they have been kept
- unlawful importation of ornamental fish and invertebrates into Australia.



Biosecurity Queensland's primary focus is on preventing the introduction of ornamental fish into our natural waterways and reducing the spread of those already present.

Ornamental fish and invertebrates as environmental pests

Exotic ornamental fish and invertebrates have the potential to become invasive if they are released into Queensland's waterways and wetlands. These

compete with native species and negatively impact on the ecosystem. Once established, these species are impossible to eradicate.

In Queensland, numerous fish species initially kept as exotic ornamental fish have become widely established in the environment. These include carp, tilapia, gambusia, platys and swordtails. Other ornamental species including guppies, gouramis and large predatory fish such as peacock bass, oscars and jaguar cichlids have also been found in our waterways and some have become locally established. Once established, eradication efforts are unlikely to succeed.

The increasing occurrence of ornamental fish and invertebrate incursions in Queensland's environment may result in the strengthening of regulations for problem or high-risk species.

Prohibited fish

Some species of ornamental fish and invertebrates have been assessed as posing a high risk to Queensland's biosecurity considerations (economy, environment and social amenity). These are listed as prohibited matter, restricted matter or non-native invasive fish under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. See the prohibited fish fact sheet for more information at biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

In Queensland, it is illegal to sell prohibited and restricted noxious fish or non-native invasive ornamental fish on Gumtree, eBay, Facebook or any other marketplace.

What does this mean for you?

Biosecurity Queensland wants people to enjoy their hobby responsibly.

Under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, everyone has a general biosecurity obligation to manage a biosecurity matter and any potential biosecurity risks that are:

- under their control and
- that they know about or should reasonably be expected to know about.

As part of your general biosecurity obligation, you must:

- take all reasonable and practical steps to prevent or minimise each biosecurity risk
- minimise the likelihood of causing a biosecurity event and limit the consequences if such an event is caused
- prevent or minimise the harmful effects a risk could have, and abstain from anything that might increase harmful effects.

All living plants and animals (other than humans) may be considered biosecurity matter. This includes ornamental fish and invertebrates. A biosecurity risk exists when you deal with any pest (such as a fish), disease or contaminant or something that could carry one of these. A biosecurity event is caused by a pest, disease or contaminant that is or is likely to become a problem for human health, social amenity, the economy or the environment.

Some of the practical ways in which you can help protect our environment and meet your general biosecurity obligation include:

- never purposefully release any fish into Queensland's waterways, wetlands or drains
- prevent the accidental escape of fish by keeping them in tanks or ponds which don't overflow into the environment or are likely to be flooded
- don't siphon aquarium tank water, which may contain eggs, larvae or fry into drains particularly if they flow to creeks
- return unwanted fish to the retailer, rehome them or humanly euthanize and dispose of them in municipal waste
- avoid breeding ornamental fish - many species have large numbers of offspring which are difficult to sell or rehome leading to a surplus of unwanted fish
- do not keep any fish that is prohibited under Queensland legislation
- keep only lawfully imported ornamental fish and invertebrates and report suspected unlawful imports
- report sightings of ornamental fish and invertebrates in Queensland's wetlands and waterways to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

The importation of exotic ornamental fish and invertebrates

The importation of ornamental fish (and all other animals) into Australia is regulated by the Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (DAWE) under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act 1999) through the List of Specimens Taken to be Suitable for Live Import ('Live Import List').

It is a Commonwealth offence to import fish or possess a fish or invertebrate or its progeny (i.e. offspring) if it was imported in contravention to the EPBC Act 1999. All imported fish also need certification under the *Commonwealth Biosecurity Act 2015* as being disease free. Many fish and invertebrates in the aquarium trade have been unlawfully imported (or smuggled) into Australia. Unlawful imports which bypass Australia's inspection and quarantine requirements pose an additional biosecurity risk by providing an undetectable entry point for exotic pests, parasites and pathogens into the country.

Suspected unlawful imports in Queensland should be reported to DAWE for investigation. Reports made to Biosecurity Queensland will also be referred to DAWE and investigations into the biosecurity risk of suspected unlawful imports under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* may follow.

Further information

Further Information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

Questions about the importation of live fish into Australia should be directed to the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment on 1800 900 090 or visit agriculture.gov.au.

List of Specimens Taken to be Suitable for Live Import is available at environment.gov.au.

To report a biosecurity concern about imported fish, call the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment on 1800 798 636 or visit agriculture.gov.au.



Assassin snail (*Clea (Anentome) helena*)



Peacock bass (*Cichla* spp.)

This fact sheet is developed with funding support from the Land Protection Fund.

Fact sheets are available from Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) service centres and our Customer Service Centre (telephone 13 25 23). Check our website at biosecurity.qld.gov.au to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this fact sheet should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation, and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the use of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, DAF does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it. (some images courtesy of WikiCommons)