



Aquarium Professionals Group

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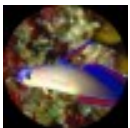
Saltwater Fish Guarantees - What's Fair?

Points of View:



The Customer:

- **Inexperienced and new aquarists** are at the mercy of aquarium stores when it comes to purchasing fish and other aquatic animals. Many fish stores are only interested in selling instead of educating. As a result, new hobbyists are often sold incompatible or sick fish. Without a guarantee, there is no recourse.
- **A loyal customer that purchases their aquarium**, equipment, and all their supplies and fish from a retail store depends on the store for education and guidance in selecting livestock. The store is the "expert" source for information. What happens when the store makes a mistake?
- **Anything else bought at retail** comes with some sort of guarantee to protect the consumer. Other pets are guaranteed. Why not fish and other aquatic life?



The Retail Store:

- **Rising Costs: While freshwater fish prices** have remained relatively stable, remaining in line with inflation, wholesale marine livestock prices have risen dramatically in the last five years. However, people will only pay so much for a fish, so the mark-up the retail market can bear has fallen resulting in much lower profits on saltwater fish and invertebrates. Higher water and utility bills, and the high cost of employing a knowledgeable staff complete the picture. While saltwater livestock losses are down at the retail level due to better collection, handling and shipping methods, many aquarium fish wholesalers do not give retail stores a guarantee on livestock. While many out-of-state wholesale fish distributors do give "live-arrival" guarantees, the retail store gets no guarantee on any livestock that die the next day. This also adds to the high cost of selling saltwater fish.
- **Customer Problems: The store has no control** over what the customer does with their fish once they get the animal home. Many fish that die within guarantee periods are subjected to stress due to improper acclimation, over-stocking, incompatibility with other specimens, or poor water conditions because some customers are unwilling to learn more about their aquaria. To make matters worse, it is impossible to know if a customer is being truthful about their aquarium. There is no way to know if a customer is really doing what they say, has the size aquarium they claim, or even if water they brought into the store to be tested is from their aquarium. Unless the store is willing to pay an employee to make a house call to the customer's home, the customer must be taken at their word. House calls may often cost more than the replacement cost of the fish. The customer also has a motivation to be less than honest, if being honest means they will not get credit for a dead fish.
- **Many aquarium hobbyists are buying dry goods** and aquarium equipment on the internet or from mail-order houses which can sell at much lower prices because they buy in mass quantities and don't have the same overhead structure as a retail store. There is no question that gross sales have dropped for most independent aquarium stores as a result of sales lost to these "wholesale" sources. The bottom line is that higher costs and less sales mean finding a way to cut expenses if hobbyists are not willing to fully support their aquarium stores by spending more money. and aquarium equipment on the internet or from mail-order houses which can sell at much lower prices because they buy in mass quantities and don't have the same overhead structure as a retail store.

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