



# Aquarium Professionals Group

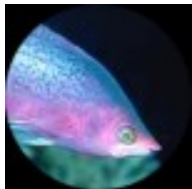
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## Saltwater Fish Guarantees - What's Fair?



**Abe Lincoln's old adage:** "You can't please all of the people all of the time" certainly applies to saltwater fish guarantees, but some compromises exist for both aquarium stores and hobbyists that will certainly "please most of the people . . . ."

### Here are our solutions:

#### For the Store:

**Aquarium stores need to be very careful and honest** when selling any aquarium livestock. No one should operate an aquarium store if their only motivation is to make a fast buck. It's easy to make a quick profit selling that baby Leopard Shark to a 55 gallon tank, but you'll make more money in the long run with repeat business if you JUST SAY NO! Make other recommendations, and if the customer walks out when you refuse to sell a fish that you know won't work, let them go! You haven't lost a sale! You've lost a HASSLE! That customer may walk out unhappy now but they'll be back (with more respect for your expertise) after they buy the fish elsewhere and what you told them would happen comes true.

**Educate yourself, your staff, and your customers.** Train your customers from the beginning that with marine aquaria, less is more and patience is the key! Don't give the customer unrealistic expectations and they won't have any. If a customer, when planning to buy a new tank, asks how many fish they can keep, be conservative with your answers. Don't oversell! If a customer's tank is full, tell them so! They'll appreciate your honesty, and maybe they'll buy a larger aquarium from you. Sell books, but also read them and be prepared for questions. Not all books explain things well.

**Qualify your customers!** Find out what a customer expects before you sell them an aquarium. If they aren't willing to maintain the tank, can you provide that service and do it well? Are they willing to learn about their aquarium? Do they have unrealistic expectations? Sometimes it's better to let another store get the sale if you hear warning bells going off in your head when talking to a prospective customer. Be honest with yourself.

**Don't sell fish that you know don't do well in captivity.** If you sell marine sharks, stingrays, certain species of butterfly fish, ribbon eels, or dragonets (and the list goes on) to the wrong aquarium, be prepared to eat your profit when the customer walks in with a dead fish. Again, know the fish you're selling or please, don't sell the fish!

**Make sure there can be no misunderstandings.** Define your guarantee policies clearly and in writing. If you require a water sample before replacing a fish, make sure you say so. Post your guarantee policies where they may easily be seen by anyone. Have your staff explain the policies before ringing up the sale.

**No matter what your guarantee policy is,** be fair and consistent. There will always be cases when a dead fish should be replaced due to an error made by an employee or for other reasons that are definitely not the fault of the customer. Analyze the situation carefully, and consider splitting the loss with the customer if you can't find fault with them or your store. Consider starting a "preferred customer" plan. Preferred customers are those that give you their loyalty. They bought their aquarium, their supplies, and all of their fish from you. They don't shop mail-order and they don't waste your time and then buy elsewhere. Print up ID cards for them that entitle them to lower prices or discounts, but never give one customer a better guarantee than you give to everyone. Word gets around!

#### For the Hobbyist:

**Before shopping for fish, shop for a good store!** Once you find a good store, give them your loyalty! Aquarium store people learn their customers quickly. If you're one of those people who pumps a good aquarium store for information

and then goes out and buys everything mail-order, read no further. You don't deserve a break! The store will also eventually catch onto your game, and don't be surprised when you finally get the cold shoulder. Folks! Retail aquarium stores can't compete with mail order prices but they can compete with good information and knowledge. Support your store!

**When an aquarium store recommends not buying a fish** for your aquarium, DON'T BUY IT! Think about this for a moment. The store is in business to make money, but in this business, money can't be the only motivation. Listen to a store's recommendations and take their advice or be willing to assume full responsibility for the loss if things don't work out.

**Educate yourself.** If you are unsure of your aquarium store, read everything you can about a particular fish before you buy it. Become a hobbyist. Even if you have an aquarium maintenance company clean your aquarium, you owe it to yourself and your fish to learn more about your aquarium. Owning an aquarium is a two way street. It's your aquarium and you can't lay all the responsibility for learning everything on your local aquarium store. If they have to teach their customers everything, they won't have time to operate a store!

**Use patience and restraint.** It takes time to stock an aquarium. The process should be undertaken slowly and carefully. If you try to rush things, expect trouble. If you add one more fish when your aquarium is full, expect to lose some. If an aquarium store advises you against purchasing a fish and you insist you want to try it anyway, don't run back to the store for a refund if the fish dies or if you have a problem. Please remember, you insisted on buying that fish!

**Know your aquarium store's policies.** If they don't have a guarantee notice posted, ask them what their policies are. Remember, it's always "buyer beware." Once you know your store's policies, honor them yourself! If a store has a 24 hour guarantee, don't get upset if they don't replace a fish you bought two days ago. If they make exceptions to their rules, THEY AREN'T RULES!