



May 21, 2019

Ron Coughlin, CEO
Petco

Dear Mr. Coughlin,

On behalf of our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide, I must ask you to take immediate action to stop the suffering and death of betta fish sold by Petco—an issue that we receive many complaints about. We have now visited more than 100 Petco stores across the country and documented widespread suffering of these sensitive animals as well as filthy containers and other problems that cast Petco in a bad light. After learning what we found, I think you'll see that ending Petco's sales of bettas is absolutely the right thing to do.

The [video footage](#) shows sick, dying, and dead bettas languishing in minuscule, barren plastic cups on Petco's store shelves. Many are forced to live in water that's badly contaminated with their own excrement. In such a small volume of water, ammonia from the fish's waste accumulates and quickly consumes oxygen, turning the water toxic. An Ohio store worker commented that a betta's eye was "literally popping out of his head," likely caused by "poor water conditions."

These tiny cups—as well as the small tanks that Petco sells for bettas—deprive them of space for exercise, hiding places, mental stimulation, and a proper temperature. A Florida store staff member suggested that a betta was "frantic" from being confined to "such a small swimming space." And at a Virginia store, a worker rightly called the half-gallon tanks that Petco sells for bettas "completely inhumane" and noted that water in the cups that bettas were kept in was only 74 degrees Fahrenheit—lower than the minimum recommended temperature for these animals.

Many bettas were visibly suffering from fin rot, swim-bladder disorders, and other critical medical conditions. Yet instead of taking them to a veterinarian, employees were left to guess at diagnoses and left them untreated. One betta who had apparently arrived at a North Carolina store floating on his side because of a swim-bladder issue was left that way for months. Petco's "solution" was to sell the fish at a discounted price. Many fish were found dead in the cups, likely because of gross neglect.

Employees falsely advised customers that fish who were swimming or floating on their sides should be fed a green pea—a dangerous practice that experts decry. According to aquatic veterinarian Jena Questen, "A fish ... lying on [the] side or swimming with difficulty can have a number of health issues, including tumors, bacterial, fungal, viral infections, parasites, or other diseases, few of which respond well to adding fiber to the diet, alone (peas) ... the fish may get sicker while [the] primary problem is not addressed, and this delay in adequate

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treatment can lead to the fish not being able to survive the disease, even with appropriate treatment ... a fish ... not swimming normally in the store, is sick, and needs medical treatment."

Countless bettas also die before, or shortly after, reaching Petco's stores because they're subjected to grueling transport in minuscule plastic bags that offer scarcely enough water for them even to submerge their bodies. An Indiana store worker said, "We get [betta fish] in sick a lot," and reported that bettas are "stressed out" during shipment and that stress "induces a lot more illness." A Cleveland store employee admitted that "one of those ugly things a pet store might not tell you" is that a "lot of fish that come into a store don't last through ... a weekend."

I'm sure you know that Petco does *not* need to sell bettas. According to the American Pet Products Association, sales of live animals account for only a tiny fraction of pet stores' profits: In 2018, Americans spent more than \$46 billion on food and supplies for animal companions—a number that grows every year, while sales of live animals are declining.

Chalking up these animals' miserable lives and deaths to the cost of doing business is unacceptable. Please, let me hear from you that you will make the sound business and ethical decision to end Petco's betta sales now. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ingrid E. Newkirk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end.

Ingrid E. Newkirk
President