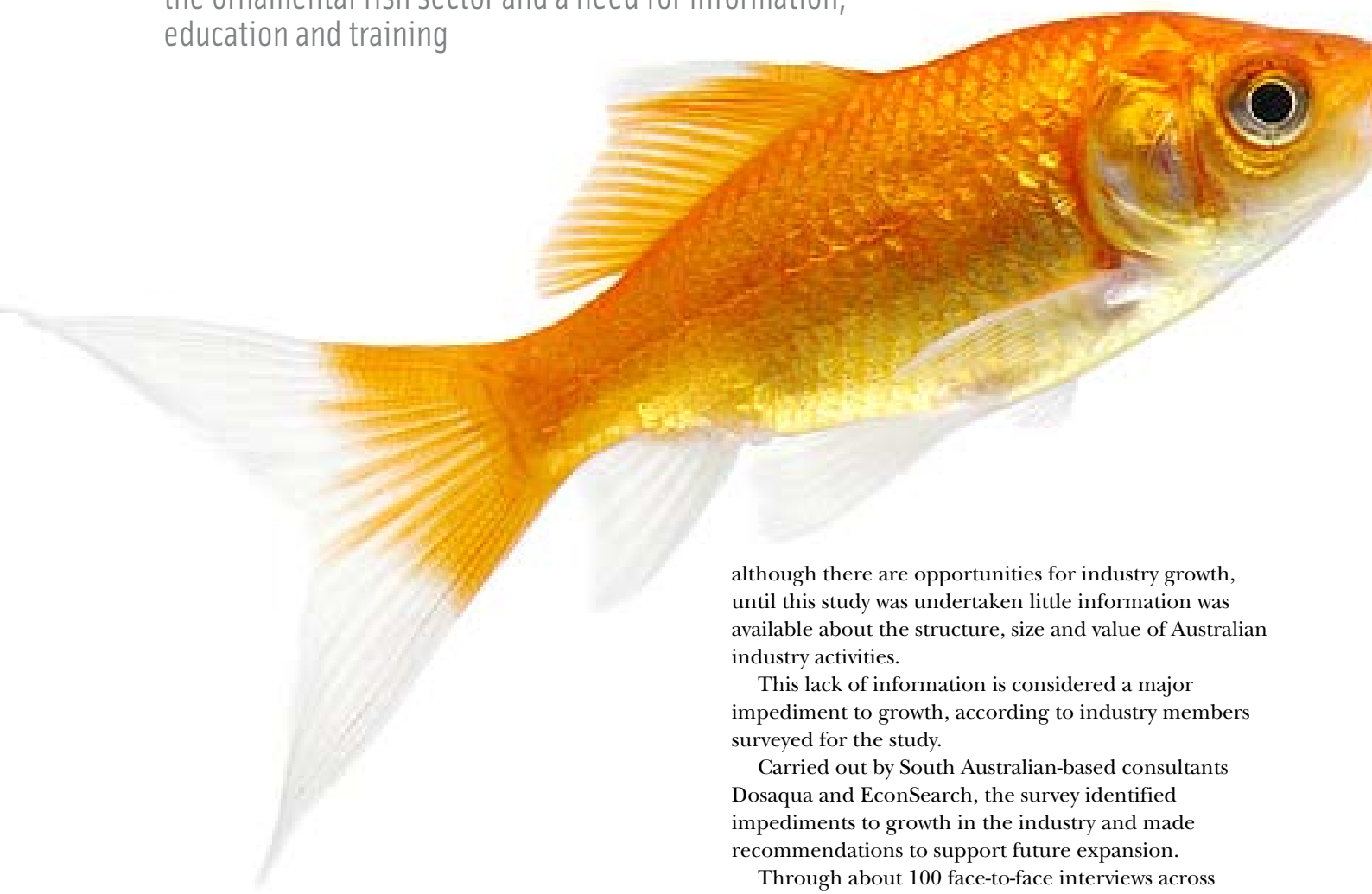


DATA TO DRIVE ORNAM

An industry survey identifies opportunities for growth in the ornamental fish sector and a need for information, education and training



Whether it is keeping a couple of goldfish in a bowl on the kitchen bench or maintaining an expensive tropical fish tank to create a soothing atmosphere in the office, ornamental fish are big business. A recent study – supported by the FRDC and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – that involved a survey across all sectors of the industry estimates the value of the ornamental fish industry in Australia, including traders, fish breeders, retail outlets and the hobby market, at more than \$300 million a year.

Breeding and keeping ornamental fish involve techniques similar to those used in aquaculture, and

although there are opportunities for industry growth, until this study was undertaken little information was available about the structure, size and value of Australian industry activities.

This lack of information is considered a major impediment to growth, according to industry members surveyed for the study.

Carried out by South Australian-based consultants Dosaqua and EconSearch, the survey identified impediments to growth in the industry and made recommendations to support future expansion.

Through about 100 face-to-face interviews across Australia with a random selection of individuals and businesses, including breeders, collectors, importers/wholesalers and retailers of ornamental fish, EconSearch consultant Elizabeth Clark found that respondents highlighted this lack of information, plus training, as major issues. “A strong message that came through was the need for some formal training and industry guidelines,” she says.

Another concern was a lack of cohesion in the industry due to different regulations in the various states.

However, positive trends for growth – such as an increase in housing density (ornamental fish being a convenient pet for small houses and apartments) – were also identified. Another trend was an interest in marine collections.

ORNAMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES



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“The popularity of marine aquariums is definitely increasing,” Elizabeth Clark says. “Keeping marine species, such as live rocks and corals, is a growth area and one that has become easier due to the availability of new technology.”

The survey also found that coral exports have increased and identified a greater interest in native species and planted aquariums.

On the other hand, too much competition and the lack of formal education and training were seen as impediments to industry growth. Other problems identified were difficult-to-understand regulations, labour shortages and high wage costs, water restrictions, economic factors (such as unemployment and interest rates), the poor image of wild catch fisheries, costly losses through the supply chain and diseases from imported fish threatening local production.

Many respondents said they would like to see an increase in the availability of ornamental fish bred locally, while others believed that the quality of imported fish was much better than the local product.

“Imported fish are cheaper and different species are available that can’t be bred here,” Elizabeth Clark says. “It is difficult for Australian breeders to compete.”

One outcome of the study was a list of recommendations highlighting opportunities to support future growth. These included: developing a database

of industry stakeholders, so that the industry can be easily identified; implementing similar regulations on licensing, translocation and species usage in all states and territories; and standard licensing to be established for all commercial operators.

An electronic copy of the report, *The Australian ornamental fish industry in 2006-07*, is available from the FRDC. ●

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MORE INFORMATION: Elizabeth Clark, esclark@econsearch.com.au; there will be an ornamental fish session at Australasian Aquaculture 2008 in Brisbane, 3 to 6 August, www.australian-aquacultureportal.com

Ornamental fish industry facts

- More than 2000 species of marine and freshwater finfish, crustaceans, molluscs and other animals are traded.
- Imports of fish were reported to be 17.7 million fish.
- Domestic production was estimated to be 8.3 million fish (7.7 million from aquaculture and 0.6 million from wild catch).
- More than 200 licensed fish breeders, catchers and importers supply through a network of wholesalers who, in turn, sell to an estimated 1200 pet shops and specialist aquarium outlets around the country.
- An active, but difficult to quantify, trade exists in fish within hobby associations and between enthusiasts. Fish are also sold or swapped (for store credits) to retailers and wholesalers.