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## Telling Our Story with Finding Dory

*With the release of the new movie Finding Dory, the pet industry has an opportunity to educate the public on fish keeping, environmental stewardship and the need to protect the aquarium hobby.*

BY MIKE BOBER

Later this month, *Finding Dory*, a highly anticipated sequel to the movie *Finding Nemo*, will swim into theaters across the country. While some media have chosen to portray this as a crisis-in-waiting for marine life, the reality is that it is a chance for those of us in the pet industry to engage large numbers of people across multiple generations. It's up to us to inform them about the many ways the aquatics trade works to protect aquatic life, advance environmental responsibility and partner with hobbyists and newcomers alike to promote responsible fish keeping.

*Finding Dory* follows a sweet and amnesic *Paracanthurus hepatus*, also known as a palette surgeonfish, royal blue tang or hippo tang, as she seeks to reunite with her family. The concept, colors and characters are sure to be a hit with children of all ages. That's what has some people worried.

In the years since the release of *Finding Nemo*, there have been several attempts to demonstrate a so-called "Nemo effect" on wild populations of clownfish. Despite the frequency with which it is cited, however, there is no real evidence to support such an effect. While the movie did encourage many families to consider bringing freshwater and marine aquariums into their homes, breeders and sellers of clownfish saw no appreciable rise in demand.

Even so, we in the responsible aquatics trade should be ready to tell our story when it comes to *Finding Dory*. We should be advocating aquariums as a great opportunity to introduce children to the requirements of pet ownership. We should be talking about the demonstrated health benefits aquariums offer to patients in long-term care facilities. But there are important things we need to do, as well.

We need to discuss the responsibilities and requirements that go into fish keeping, and to help interested newcomers find their right fish. We also need to talk about all of the positive things that the industry does to promote conservation, captive breeding and responsible collection practices around the world. And we need to partner with hobbyists and enthusiasts to defend aquarium keeping from those who would harm it through unnecessarily restrictive legislation.

While the industry is working to spread the word about our efforts through national campaigns, our greatest opportunity for advocacy occurs each and every time someone walks into a store interested in aquatics. In preparation for these conversations, we would encourage all retailers to keep in mind three key elements of telling our story with *Finding Dory*.

## **Preparation**

The first step in creating a new, lifelong aquarium enthusiast is matching them up with the ideal starter setup. While they may be enchanted by Dory and her friends, the reality is that a hippo tang requires a significant investment of space and resources to appropriately care for it. Discussions with a newcomer to aquarium keeping that focus on housing needs, care requirements and compatibility are essential; while some people may be prepared to care for a hippo tang, we can help guide others to alternatives that they are more likely to succeed with and enjoy.

## **Protection**

Educated customers will want to know what we're doing as an industry to ensure that we're not harming the environment or endangering marine life in the course of supplying them with their aquarium fish. This is an opportunity to discuss a wide range of industry initiatives that focus on environmental stewardship, support of indigenous collectors and sustainable aquaculture. Some excellent examples of these efforts include:

- **Habitattitude**—This public-private partnership focuses on the importance of protecting the environment by not releasing unwanted fish, reptiles and aquatic plants into the wild.
- **Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF)**—A nonprofit organization working to preserve and restore threatened coral species, the CRF is active around the world in cultivating and “outplanting” new coral to combat the declines that were experienced in previous decades.
- **Project Piaba**—Sustainable fishing is an economic driver along the Rio Negro in Brazil. Without this source of income, local peoples would be forced to turn to more environmentally impactful occupations such as mining and logging. Project Piaba promotes the Amazonian aquarium fish trade and helps to preserve it as a viable livelihood.
- **Rising Tide Conservation**—This initiative focuses on the development of fish propagation techniques that allow for more marine ornamental species to be sustainably raised in captivity.

## **Partnership**

Aquatic enthusiasts are among the best-educated and most-engaged pet owners, and they recognize the need to defend their hobby against well-intentioned, but ultimately harmful, regulations and legislation. Developing relationships with the customers you supply – either individually or through local aquatic societies – is the key to being able to quickly and effectively engage. At the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC), we maintain an Aquatic Defense Fund for exactly this purpose; contact us for more information on how to get involved.

With these concepts in mind, we can all work together to ensure that this film release and others like it in the future result in positive experiences and increased awareness.

*Mike Bober is president and CEO of the [Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council](#). For more information on ways to engage the public and your elected officials, contact him at [mbober@pijac.org](mailto:mbober@pijac.org).*