



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jay Quigley, Berkeley Coalition for Animals | jay@berkeleycoalition.org | 850.274.1846
October 17, 2017

BERKELEY CITY COUNCIL BANS GIVING AWAY FISH AS PRIZES

Fish Now Subject to Same Protection as Rabbits, Birds

BERKELEY, Calif. — Tonight, the Berkeley City Council voted unanimously to prohibit giving away live fish as prizes at competitions or fairs. An existing California [law](#) already provided the same protection for birds and rabbits, but within Berkeley city limits this protection is now extended to fish.

Goldfish and Betta fish are among the most commonly used breeds used for carnival prizes. According to a PETA information [page](#), these fish are often raised in enormous, cramped tubs and then transported in tiny bags with poor filtration. The poor conditions---along with the typical "prize" recipients' low level of care instruction and lackluster motivation to attend to fishes' needs---result in the fish dying at very high rates.

Scientists, however, resoundingly contend that fish feel pain in robust ways, not unlike birds or mammals. Renowned ethologist Dr. Jonathan Balcombe's [prominent](#) 2016 book [What a Fish Knows](#) contends that fishes' mental lives include the capability to feel pains and pleasures, to recognize other individuals including humans, and memories. Prominent animal welfare biologist Dr. Marc Bekoff [reports](#) that in a 2015 issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Animal Sentience*, 27 of 30 scientific experts on the subject agreed that fish feel pain.

Legislative Intern Simone Stevens, who initiated and authored initial versions of the bill, stated she is "so proud to have been a part of ending the cruel and needless practice of using fish as prizes." She joins the slim (or nonexistent?) ranks of high school students ever to have written a bill that became Berkeley law.

Amy Halpern-Laff, a local animal advocate and co-founder of the Berkeley Coalition for Animals (BCA), remarked that "this is an important and commendable step, and a token of our city's leadership when it comes to making progress for all animals." BCA secretary Dr. Jay Quigley stated that "one thing to admire about this legislation is it rejects the notion that we may use fish as gimmicks or expendable commodities. We humans should regard ourselves not as domineers but as guardians, and this legislation reflects that attitude." BCA member Jean Harte added that "fish have perspectives and complex mental lives, including emotions such as sadness and depression, as recently detailed in the [New York Times](#). Depression is almost certainly induced when a fish is confined to a tiny, solitary plastic bag."

According to a [petition](#) circulated by Quigley, four U.S. states already prohibit fish prize giveaways. As of this writing, the petition had gathered 639 signatures.

Advocates are hoping Berkeley will be far from the last city to make this stride. In the words of Stevens: "I hope that other cities will soon follow the shining example Berkeley set tonight by outlawing this senseless abuse of innocent creatures."

###