



The Pet Industry Federation's response to the *Pets: easy or difficult to keep* (EMODE) publication

The Pet Industry Federation welcomes any initiative which improves animal welfare but has concerns about the origin and validity of this document.

Publication content

The concept of a traffic light system for establishing the complexity of keeping different types of animals is not new and in theory could be a useful tool for the pet trade and potential owner alike. However the system is flawed as it is too rigid to be useful in a practical situation.

The ability to keep and ultimately the commitment to sustaining responsible ownership is broader than scoring against a set of six questions.

There is no allowance in this document for the potential owners' resources, knowledge and experience of keeping animals or a certain type of animal, which has to be crucial to the welfare of the animal. If an owner or keeper has the relevant knowledge and experience then the pet is neither unsuitable nor difficult to keep.

There is little consideration for the ability and commitment of the potential owner, apart from question six which could be seen as discriminatory.

The Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC), set up to conduct independent studies into the welfare, care and treatment of companion animals and their role within society found that...."it may be easier to keep some non-domesticated species to high welfare standards than some that are domesticated. Thus, meeting all the requirements - space, dietary, social, thermal, and so on - of a small, hardy, reptile may be more readily achievable for many people than adequately fulfilling all the needs of some breeds of dog" (CAWC, 2003).

The EMODE scoring system seems irrational; for instance the whole taxa of reptiles and amphibians are scored 18 which predetermines that this taxa are difficult to keep. Certainly some taxa in this group do have specific needs which may be difficult for a novice owner to fulfil but others, such as a Bearded Dragon and Corn Snake, can be fairly easily kept with all their welfare needs catered for.

The converse of this is all dogs are scored five which assumes all dogs are easy to keep. On the whole this is true, however, there are some breeds of dogs that have special requirements in terms of exercise, mental stimulation and coat care. The same can be said of certain breeds of cat which need extra stimulation or grooming.

The authors

The document has been written by a set of individuals, some of whom have strong views on keeping certain taxa. We understand that the document has had no input from stakeholder groups, or specialist societies or groups, nor has it been peer reviewed. We would also advise that this method of scoring 'difficulty' is not a sound and unbiased way of determining the 'difficulty' or 'suitability' of a pet.

Sale of pets in pet shops

All pet shops are licensed by their local authority and are 'viewed' daily by the pet owning public. Under the Animal Welfare Act(s) husbandry advice must be given at the point of sale (verbally), and the Model Licence Conditions reinforce this by stipulating written instructions must be given in the form of a care sheet (CIEH Model Conditions for Pet Vending Licensing 2013 14.1).

The MLCs also stipulate that one person at the pet shop must hold the City & Guilds qualification in Pet Store Management (or equivalent), a qualification which is equivalent to the RCVS Veterinary Nursing qualification.

The criteria also stipulate that staff members must be able to provide suitable advice to purchasers and answer questions as required by them (14.3) and that the licensee must be able to demonstrate appropriate staff training is carried out and that that staff are competent in pet shop management and animal handling (14.4).

Pet shop staff are trained and well placed to guide owners to choose a pet which suits them and their lifestyle. An emphasis on educating the public on responsible pet ownership is for more conducive to animal welfare than using an inflexible, and in this instance, a biased list of questions.