



National Council of SPCAs

Garra Rufa Fish in beauty treatments

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The National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA) has serious concerns about the use of Garra Rufa Fish in beauty treatments. This is an emerging and growing trend in South Africa with spa's engaging in this cruel and unnecessary practice. The NSPCA is opposed to the use of fish for any beauty treatments and do not see any benefit to the wellbeing of the animals used and discourages the support of any such establishments.



WELFARE CONCERNS

Fish require a stable environment with the correct water quality and temperature. Sudden changes in water temperature can seriously compromise the welfare of the fish, leading to unnecessary suffering and may even result in the death of these animals. Water quality is of paramount importance in maintaining healthy fish. Oxygen levels and chemicals such as ammonia and nitrite will also affect the welfare of the fish.

If the incorrect shape and size tank is used it could have a considerable impact on the stability of the water conditions and the oxygenation of the water. Overcrowding fish in a small volume of water will lead to increased concentrations of ammonia which will affect the health of the fish. Fish should also be provided with adequate protection against bright light and should be provided with adequate shelter to be able to escape from aggression fish.



TOXINS IN THE WATER

Once a person's feet are placed into the water, chemicals that are toxic to the fish, such as skin care products or nail-varnish, may intoxicate the water. Chemicals used to clean or disinfect the tanks or to clean the clients feet prior to treatment may also be toxic to the fish. These chemicals may have an adverse effect on the fish, leading to unnecessary suffering and may even result in the death of these animals.

INADEQUATE TRAINING TO STAFF

The NSPCA has grave concerns with regards to the competence and training provided to spa staff when it comes to the adequate feeding of these fish and to ensure their welfare. Research shows that well fed fish may show no interest in human skin, and may be unlikely to feed on skin if they have access to appropriate food sources when not being used in treatments.

DISPOSAL OF THE FISH

The NSPCA is greatly concerned about the disposal methods used once the fish have become too big to be used in pedicures or other beauty treatments. Another concern is the trade in wild caught fish and removing these animals from their natural environment. Other international animal organisations like PETA and the UK RSPCA share the same concerns about the use of Garra Rufa Fish in pedicures and other beauty treatments.

REQUIREMENTS IN TERMS OF THE LAW

All animals in South Africa, including fish, are protected in terms of the Animals Protection Act No 71 of 1962. Failure to provide the appropriate needs of the fish, either deliberately or by omission, would be a criminal and prosecutable offence. It is also a legal requirement for any establishment utilising Garra Rufa Fish in pedicures and other beauty treatments to be in possession of a valid license and certificate that is issued in terms of the Performing Animals Protection Act No 24 of 1935.

PRACTICE REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

In 2012 the NSPCA reported the use of Garra Rufa Fish in pedicures and other beauty treatments to the Department of Health following international concerns relating to the potential health risks that these fish pose with regards to the possible transfer of viruses and bacteria from people suffering with HIV or other immune deficiency diseases.

It is important to note that the practice of using Garra Rufa Fish in beauty treatments has been banned in 14 states in the USA due to public health concerns.

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