

PHOTO: JOHN DAWES. Several Pterogyra or bubble coral species (this is *P. sinuosa*, which is included as a result of a Negative Opinion of the SRG) feature on the current EU suspensions list.



INDIA

ORNAMENTAL

AQUATIC SECTOR

IN CRISIS

Some readers will, no doubt, remember the days when it was widely claimed that it was impossible to grow plants in freshwater aquaria serviced by an undergravel filter. This myth was repeated so often, via so many media, and over such a long period of time, that it became accepted as a 'fact' by countless aquarists and members of the ornamental aquatic industry worldwide.



The latticed butterfly (*Chaetodon rafflesii*) is just one of 46 butterflyfishes on the Indian banned species list, along with many angels, seahorses, wrasses, basslets, gobies, damsels, clownfish...
PHOTO: JOHN DAWES

It was a perfect example of something that is quite incorrect, but becomes accepted as truth through sheer volume of repetition over time.

Now...take the following statements:

"If there is one trade in India which is completely illegal, unregulated and unlooked at by government and wildlife activists, it is the aquarium trade. Millions of fish are caught and put into small glass prisons every year where they die within a few weeks.

"If watching these poor animals struggle for space and swim endlessly to and fro in two feet of space is relaxing then you have to be as mentally disturbed as the fish probably are. In a mammal, this endless repetitive swimming would be analysed as stress behaviour. But who cares about fish?"

"Where do coloured fish come from? No one in the trade will tell you, or they will give you vague replies like they have been bred in Kolkata or Mumbai. But clownfish, for instance, the demand for which shot up after the cartoon Disney film Finding Nemo, cannot be bred. They come from coral reefs and they are long distance swimmers. Baby clownfish travel as much as 400 kilometres to find anemones, without which they cannot live. 90% are killed by natural predators during their travels. Now the other 10% are being poached for your "relaxation".

"Exporters from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore loot and sell millions of marine animals with impunity".

"No rules are followed at all - by exporters or importers".

"No airports keep records and Cochin is the worst".

"The aquarium trade should be banned. Have we not banned hunting for mammals and birds? So, why do we allow hunting, selling and buying of fish?"

Do these statements ring true in any way whatsoever? No, of course, not! The person responsible, obviously, has little or no idea what she is talking about. It is clear that she hasn't read any of the relevant literature, or has done so, but has chosen to ignore it, maybe because the evidence and data factually contradict what she wants to say. The person behind these and many other equally incorrect statements is Maneka Sanjay Gandhi, Indian Union Cabinet Minister for Women and Child Development in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. She is an animal rights activist and environmentalist, is the widow of Indian politician, Sanjay