

**Presentation to the Emergency and Protective Services
Committee, City of Ottawa, September 23, 2002, by
Jonathan Crowe, President, Ottawa Amphibian and
Reptile Association¹**

My name is Jonathan Crowe, I'm the president of the Ottawa Amphibian and Reptile Association—and I live here.²

Before I begin, a little bit about ourselves. The Ottawa Amphibian and Reptile Association has been active since the early 1980s. Among other things, we have been educating the public with our displays and providing technical expertise in respect of reptiles and amphibians to animal control officers in the Ottawa area, and we are more than willing to continue to offer our assistance in the future.

Now to the proposed by-law. I'd like to begin by saying that we support the general thrust of the proposed animal care and control by-law. We support the prohibition of animals that would present a risk to public health and safety or whose care would be beyond the capabilities of a home. Insofar as reptiles and amphibians are concerned, that means venomous snakes and lizards, giant snakes and lizards, and crocodilians. We are glad to see that those animals are included in Schedule A of the proposal. We are also glad to see that green iguanas—which are a major adoption and rescue problem in our field—will also be prohibited.

On the other hand, we believe that where there is no risk to public health and safety and the animal's care in captivity is not problematic, there is no reason for that animal to be prohibited. Reptile and amphibian care is now at a stage where most animals are bred in captivity, the care requirements for most animals are widely available in books, magazine articles or online, and expert veterinary care specializing in reptiles

¹ Note: This version approximates the version given at the meeting in that it tries to recapture certain last-minute rewrites (by hand) and certain improvised comments. It's as close as I can make it.

² This was a gentle jab at other presenters, a large number of which seemed to be from out of town.

and amphibians is available in most larger centres, including the City of Ottawa.

Our primary concern with the proposal is that a few animals that are neither dangerous nor difficult are included in the list set out in Schedule A of the proposed by-law. While we do not object to PIJAC's recommendation of the City of Toronto's three-metre/two-metre rule,³ we recognize that there may be some resistance to that proposal. As a result, I will be recommending in this presentation some changes to the Schedule to address the situation that I hope will be acceptable. We also have some concerns about adoption and fostering that I will turn to afterwards.

Our first recommendation concerns small boas and pythons. As the proposal reads now, all boas and pythons are prohibited under Schedule A. This covers the giant snakes. But it also prohibits some snakes that are very small, very tame, and extremely easy to care for—the exact sort of snakes that you want people to keep, if they're going to keep snakes at all. For example, rosy boas and sand boas—gentle snakes that reach a maximum length of about a metre. There are other small boas and pythons—some a little bit larger, some even smaller—that are entirely appropriate to keep in captivity, by which I mean that they can be housed properly in a reasonably sized cage by nonspecialists, and that captive-bred offspring are readily available. This would essentially be like banning domestic cats to keep out lions and tigers.

Therefore, we recommend that exceptions be made for members of the families Boidae and Pythonidae that reach a maximum adult length of not more than two metres. This would cover the species I'm talking about.

Our second recommendation concerns small monitor lizards. The Varanidae family includes the largest lizards in the world. But it also includes several very small species whose care in captivity is not problematic—they can be kept in a four-foot-long cage. And captive-bred offspring is increasingly available. For individuals

³ Louis McCann of PIJAC, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, recommended the Toronto by-law, which only prohibits snakes longer than three metres, lizards longer than two metres, venomous animals and crocodilians.

interested in this sort of thing, these small lizards—Storr’s monitor reaches about a foot in length; the ridge-tailed monitor reaches two feet—are quite suitable.

So, we would also like to have an exemption for members of the lizard family Varanidae that reach a maximum length of not more than one metre.

Third, we want to make sure that the grandfathering provisions of the by-law include adoption and fostering programs that will be effective. The proposal prohibits a number of lizard species in particular that have been widely available in the City of Ottawa for quite some time, including green iguanas, tegus, and medium- and large-sized monitors. Grandfathering provisions should accommodate efforts to find new homes for existing animals, and I’m confident, based on the discussions I’ve had, that this will be the case.

Thank you for your time. Any questions?