



21 June 2012

Health & Research Ethics Section
Research Translation - Canberra
National Health and Medical Research Council
GPO Box 1421
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Targeted Consultation on the *Policy on the Care and Use of Non-Human Primates for Scientific Purposes.*

Humane Research Australia opposes the use of animals in research and teaching on both ethical and scientific grounds. We do not in any way condone the use of animals for scientific purposes regardless of whether or not their use is in accordance with any code of practice or policy. We do however wish to comment on the following.

Application and scope

Considering the close proximity of other primates to our own species, the cognitive abilities and social cultures identified in primates, it is highly unethical to use these species as 'research tools'.

*"It is possible to associate the ability to exercise higher cognitive capacities with neurological complexity. This is not to say that 'more-developed' animals are more important than 'less-developed' ones, but that there are more morally questionable ways of mistreating the more-developed ones."*¹

As mentioned under this heading in the Targeted Consultations Questions paper, page 5 of the policy states "The NHMRC will only fund research using non-human primates which meets all of the following requirements". We note that a number of these requirements are most unlikely to be met, namely items 5, 6 and 7 on page 5 of the policy document, which refer to the use of primates imported from overseas. This will be discussed further under the relevant heading.

We question why the document should only apply to NHMRC-funded research. It is imperative that there is legislative governance over such a highly-controversial use of intelligent and sentient species. It is inconceivable that any researchers be permitted to use them for such purposes without highly regulated governance and monitoring. Such governance and monitoring should entail the following:

¹ The Ethics of research involving animals, Nuffield Council on Bioethics. P.44.

- considering 'normal' AEC mechanisms are not adequate, a supra-ethics committee should be required to both decide and monitor all research using primates. The composition of that committee should comprise independent experts from all spectrums (scientific, ethical, welfare).
- it is insufficient to say that the conditions must be met, there needs to be hard evidence provided and documented that the conditions have been met
- there should be a requirement for the proposals to have documents from other similar institutions in the world where such research is undertaken that such research as is proposed has not been undertaken.
- the word 'potential' must be omitted from the requirement that the benefits of scientific knowledge gained will outweigh harm to the animal. It should be replaced with the word 'direct' which requires the investigator to demonstrate a **direct** benefit.

Use of great apes

“From the biological point of view, between two human beings there can be a difference of 0,5% in the DNA. Between a man and a chimpanzee this difference is only 1,23%. This similarity is proved, for instance, with the fact that chimpanzees can donate blood to humans, and vice-versa. Today it's also known that chimpanzees, bonobos and men had an ancestor in common two million years ago.”²

Captive great apes resemble symptoms associated with psychiatric disorders in humans such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and post traumatic stress disorder.³ Brune et al consider that the similarities between human and ape mentality are so great that it is justified to assume their vulnerability to psychosocial stress.

Considering these facts, and the similarities in social, cognitive and emotional functioning with humans, the exploitation of great primates in laboratories, circus, entertainment shows and zoos can be considered a kind of slavery, similar to how humans treated their own kind who were considered to be inferior more than one century ago.

The use of great apes for research purposes is currently banned in the Netherlands (2002), New Zealand (2000), United Kingdom (1997), Europe (2010), Sweden (2003), Germany and Austria (2006).⁴ Even in the United States where chimpanzees are still used in biomedical research, a report by the Institute of Medicine declared that ‘most current use of chimpanzees for biomedical research is unnecessary’ and no new grant applications using chimpanzees are being issued until further notice.

“[New Zealand’s ban on great ape research] may be a small step forward for the great apes, but it is nevertheless historic –the first time a parliament has voted in favor of changing the status of a group of animals so dramatically that the animal cannot be treated as a research tool...”

- Peter Singer, co-founder of the Great Ape Project

It would be prudent for Australia to implement a similar ban on the use of Great Apes in research, with the **only** exception being for non-interventional observation studies.

² <http://www.greatapeproject.org/en-US/oprojetogap/Missao>

³ M. Brune, U. Brune-Cohrs, W. McGrew, S. Preuschoft. “Psychopathology in great apes: Concepts, treatment options and possible homologies to human psychiatric disorders.” *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 30(2006) 1246-1259.

⁴ <http://www.releasechimps.org/mission/end-chimpanzee-research/country-bans/#axzz1uu1C4Wnw>

Any variation in this exception (including the current policy wording) allows for loopholes which could permit invasive zoological research on individuals.

Importation of non-human primates

The target consultation paper states “The importation of non-human primates for research is regulated by both the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service of the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and International Wildlife Trade of the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. *NHMRC does not have any regulatory role in this area.*”

This is not correct. The current policy allows for the use of imported primates in research and is therefore the point at which the importation of primates for research purposes can be stopped – if such use was disallowed within the policy.

Humane Research Australia is calling for a ban on the importation of primates for research purposes. Our reasons are as follows.

Captured from the Wild

The Policy states “Non-human primates imported from overseas must not be taken from wild populations and must be accompanied by documentation to certify their status.”⁵ Similarly, Indonesia has an official ban on the export of wild-caught macaques. Ironically, there is no restriction on the number of monkeys trapped in the wild to replenish breeding stocks.

In April 2009, the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) published a report on their undercover investigation: “Indonesia. The trade in primates for research.” The report concluded that the ban on wild-caught macaques is a sham.

I have enclosed a copy of the BUAV report for your information. The report documents:

- Concerns about compliance with Indonesian legislation as well as the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) regulations.
- Cruelty and suffering inflicted on macaques during their capture, confinement and transportation.
- Sub standard welfare conditions at Bogor Agricultural Institute, from where Australia’s imports have been sourced.

Conservation Status

Aside from the obvious ethical and welfare issues, Pig-tailed macaques are classified as Appendix II under CITES, meaning that “although not necessarily now threatened with extinction may become so unless trade in specimens of such species is subject to strict regulation in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.”⁶ With Indonesian forests being destroyed by logging, conversion of land for agricultural use and human settlement, further trade in these primates for research will further exacerbate the losses from habitat destruction.

Fate of non-human primates at the end of the project

⁵ Policy on the Use of Non-Human Primates for Scientific Purposes, NHMRC, page 5, item 7.

⁶ CITES Text of the Convention: <http://cites.org/eng/disc/text.shtml> as quoted by BUAV *Indonesia: the trade in primates for research*. 2009.

Whilst not mentioned in the Targeted Consultations Questions paper, this is an area that is necessary to consider. It has already been acknowledged that due to their close evolutionary relationship to humans, primates are worthy of special consideration in regards to their ethical treatment. However, as mentioned in the policy, the breeding colonies will not generally accept animals that have been used for scientific purposes.

Depending on the type of research conducted on the animals, some may be left in such a traumatised and/or dilapidated state that euthanasia may be the most humane option, however some animals may still have the ability to sustain a quality life. To merely dispose of these animals when they are no longer required is a total disregard of their individual worth. If their use has been funded by the NHMRC then the NHMRC and/or research institution must take responsibility to ensure that the wellbeing of these animals is guaranteed for the remainder of their natural lives. The establishment of a retired primate sanctuary could be funded primarily by the NHMRC and supported (and overseen) by animal welfare groups. These animals deserve a dignified retirement in return for their 'contribution to mankind'.

Summary

Humane Research Australia Inc. is opposed to the use of primates for research purposes and considers that instead of updating policies, **more emphasis should be placed on a commitment to phasing out the use of these animals.**

In terms of the current policy, we urge the following actions:

- tighter regulation and monitoring of all primate research through creation of a national expert Animal Ethics Committee to ensure that there is no repetition and no alternatives to primate use
- implementation of a ban on the use of great apes
- a ban on the importation of primates for research purposes
- establishment of a retirement sanctuary for primates no longer required.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Marston
Chief Executive Officer