



MEDIA RELEASE

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New guidelines for primate research will not protect our closest relatives.

The *Principles and guidelines for the care and use of non-human primates for scientific purposes* was issued last week by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), however it affords little protection for Australian primates used in cruel experiments.

The guidelines have been under review and public consultation for several years. Humane Research Australia (HRA) is disappointed that the final outcome only serves to reinforce the perceived need to use these sentient and highly cognitive animals.

HRA Chief Executive, Helen Marston: “On both scientific and ethical grounds, HRA 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 sourcing non animal alternatives and phasing out the use of these animals. In the interim however, the revision of guidelines should have been an opportunity to introduce stricter requirements and policing of their use.”

As part of their submission, HRA proposed 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
- a ban on the importation and exportation of primates for research purposes
- establishment of a retirement sanctuary for primates no longer required.

Unjustified cruelty:

The new document states: *“The complex and highly social behavior and advanced cognitive capacity of many non-human primates make it difficult to adequately provide for their needs in a captive environment or research setting. In addition, many non-human primates have long lifespans and are often used in long-term research programs or re-used in multiple experiments over the course of their lives, presenting additional challenges for their care and welfare. Consequently, there is concern that the compromise to their life associated with their confinement and use in scientific research may cause greater psychological suffering than with other species.”*

This, in itself, should be sufficient reason to end the use of primates in research, but when we also consider the growing evidence^{1,2} showing that even chimpanzees (our closest genetic relatives - though not used in Australia) are poorly representative of human biology and diseases, then that makes their use in research even more unjustified.

Importation:

The Australian breeding colonies were established to “provide a consistently high standard of care and management” yet earlier this year two marmosets, imported from France [died unexpectedly](#) and from unknown causes. The NHMRC argues that importation (and exportation) of primates is outside their jurisdiction:

“Regulatory responsibility for the importation and exportation of non-human primates rests with relevant Commonwealth government departments”

yet their new document also states:

“NHMRC requires compliance with this document as part of its funding agreement”

And under “Use of Great Apes” (page 4):

“Great apes must not be imported from overseas for use for scientific purposes.”

Why then, can't the ban on importing great apes for research be extended to a ban on all primate importations? Subjecting these sentient and highly cognitive animals to long arduous journeys in the cargo of a plane is cruel and unnecessary.

Retirement:

Under **Provisions at the conclusion of their use** (page 6)

“Retirement must be considered as an option if suitable in term of the health and temperament of the animal, and space and resources are available at a facility that can meet their species-specific physical, social and behavioural needs.”

Depending on the type of research conducted on the animals, it is acknowledged that some may be left in such a traumatised and/or dilapidated state that euthanasia may be the most humane option. However HRA recommends that the decision to kill the animals at the end of their use must be determined by an independent and qualified rehabilitator rather than the researcher or the animal ethics committee. Some animals may still have the ability to sustain a quality life and HRA strongly feels it should be up to the rehabilitator to make the judgement as to whether a quality life can be attained. 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 taxpayers 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’.

¹ [Monkey-based research on human disease: The implications of genetic differences](#). Bailey, J. (2014). *Alternatives to Laboratory Animals*, 42: 287-317

² [It's time to end the use of non-human primates in research and testing](#) - Antidote Europe's submission to the Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks.