



Wild-caught monkeys and medical research

FRAME's response to Australia's proposed ban on importing monkeys for research

A proposal to ban the import of monkeys into Australia is being opposed by scientific associations from across the globe.

The plan was put forward by a member of the Australian Greens Party as an extension of the country's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Now, the scientific journal Nature reports, opposition has been raised by several institutions and science groups, including the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS), the Society for Neuroscience in Washington DC, the Basel Declaration Society, Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council, and the Australasian Neuroscience Society. They say that the use of monkeys has contributed to numerous medical advances that have helped improve human health and welfare and banning the import of new animals would hinder future developments.

FRAME opposes the use of non-human primates in research because of the inherent stress caused by their natures. Primates are highly intelligent and social animals who are likely to be more severely affected by their experience in laboratories.

A recent report by FRAME Scientific Programme Manager Dr Michelle Hudson-Shore said: "When considering the harms faced by laboratory primates it is particularly important to take into consideration the lifetime experience of the individual animals as their complex social, behavioural and cognitive abilities mean that they can be significantly affected by transportation, husbandry and housing, capture and weaning practices.

"Given recent literature questioning the reliability of primate studies to translate to human benefits their use in safety testing and human disorder research has to be questioned. Over the past few decades there have been numerous ethical and scientific arguments put forward both in support of and against primate research but as yet no common ground has been reached where the scientific community can move towards replacing primate use completely."

Australia has three breeding colonies of primates for medical research, including macaques, marmosets and baboons, and the group in favour of continuing import say new animals are needed to maintain genetic diversity.

Australia's existing laws forbid the use of wild-caught non-human primates directly in medical research, but Senator Lee Rhiannon, who introduced the Australian bill extension, says the country should take steps to avoid the cruelty involved in trapping and transporting the wild animals.

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FRAME is the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments.

It promotes the replacement of laboratory animals with non-animal methods, through better science.

Its ultimate aim is the elimination of the need to use laboratory animals in any kind of scientific or medical procedures.