



Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

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Senator Linda Reynolds
Chair
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Reynolds

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Prohibition of Live Imports of Primates for Research) Bill 2015.

Overview of the National Health and Medical Research Council

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's leading government body for supporting health and medical research. NHMRC's functions are to foster improved health and medical knowledge, including through funding research, translating research findings into evidence-based clinical practice, administering legislation governing research, issuing guidelines and advice for ethics in health and the promotion of public health. These functions reflect the role for NHMRC set out under the *National Health and Medical Research Act 1992*.

NHMRC brings together within a single national organisation the functions of research funding and development of health advice. NHMRC funding supports research across the full spectrum of health and medical research, from basic science through to clinical, public health and health services research.

NHMRC funded research involving the use of non-human primates

NHMRC funds the use of macaques (*Macaca nemestrina* and *Macaca fascicularis*), marmosets (*Callithrix jacchus*) and baboons (*Papio hamadryas*) in health and medical research through its competitive grants funding schemes. NHMRC funded research involving non-human primates must comply with the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* and NHMRC's *Policy on the care*

and use of non-human primates for scientific purposes (NHP Policy). Compliance with the NHMRC's policy and guidelines, including the Code, is a condition of funding.

Research involving non-human primates must be approved by an institutional animal ethics committee (AEC) before it begins. The day-to-day operation of AECs is the responsibility of individual research institutions such as universities.

The AEC must be satisfied that the proposed use of non-human primates is justified, there is no alternative to the use of non-human primates (Replacement), the minimum numbers of non-human primates are used (Reduction), and adverse impact on the animals is minimised (Refinement). The AEC must approve the source of the non-human primates, and must be satisfied that any importation of animals is essential.

The NHP Policy currently requires non-human primates to be obtained from colonies in Australia or, if importation is essential for any reason, from captive-bred populations. The NHP Policy is currently under review, with public consultation on the draft revised guidelines conducted from 26 March 2015 to 8 May 2015. A final revised document is expected in early 2016.

National non-human primate breeding facilities

The national non-human primate breeding facilities were established to centralise breeding, provide a consistently high standard of animal care and management, and to allow access to non-human primates for research. Any breeding of non-human primates for research purposes, and the care and management of animals in the national non-human primate breeding facilities must be approved by an institutional AEC.

NHMRC provides direct funding support to the two national non-human primate breeding facilities. These are the National Non-Human Primate Breeding and Research Facility (macaques and marmosets) and the National Baboon Colony (baboons). In 2015, direct funding for these facilities totalled approximately \$707,000.

Comments

However, in order for the colonies to be sustainable into the future, there may be times when some importation of NHPs is required to:

- (i) maintain genetic diversity and avoid problems of inbreeding within small colonies
- (ii) supply animals, or provide for rapid expansion of the colonies, to meet urgent need, if one arises.

Thus, while noting that the importation of non-human primates presents particular concerns and that whenever possible non-human primates should not be imported, the Committee could consider whether the amendments to the legislation could provide some flexibility so that importation can be permitted, in certain specified circumstances, following approval by an AEC.

Should you require further information, please contact Samantha Robertson
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Yours sincerely

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