

**Submission
No 205**

**INQUIRY INTO USE OF PRIMATES AND OTHER ANIMALS
IN MEDICAL RESEARCH IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: European Animal Research Association

Date Received: 16 March 2022



Re: “Use of primates and other animals in medical research in New South Wales”

As Executive Director of the European Animal Research Association (EARA), I write with regards to an inquiry, the “Use of primates and other animals in medical research in New South Wales”.

The intent of this submission is to provide context on why the use of animals is still essential for biomedical research, both in Australia and beyond, and address some of the challenges that are impacting such research due to external pressure to quickly reduce or ban some aspects of animal research.

The European Animal Research Association (EARA)

EARA is a not-for-profit association representing 130 public and private research institutions, in nearly 30 countries worldwide, including Australia. EARA has been established to better inform the public and political decision makers of the continued need for, and benefits of, the humane use of animals in medical, veterinary, scientific and environmental research.

Contribution of animal research to human and animal health

The purpose of animal research is to help us provide safe and effective treatments and medicines and in the advancement of knowledge and scientific understanding. There are [countless examples](#) of how animal research has played a part in ensuring that once life-threatening diseases can be managed or eradicated altogether. Discovery of insulin was only possible thanks to essential early studies in dogs, and larger animals such as pigs and sheep have helped our understanding of how to treat circulatory diseases such as heart attacks and strokes. Pioneering Australian research involving animals led to the development of the [artificial replacement heart valve](#), and [in vitro fertilisation](#) treatment. Animal research has prevented tremendous suffering from many eradicated diseases and continues to be at the forefront of research into those diseases that present the biggest challenges to society.

Unmet health needs across a wide range of diseases worldwide demand that we use the most effective research and treatments currently available. Development of new drugs and surgical techniques will

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be severely impeded without continued animal research, with some branches of medical research coming to a complete stop.

Primate use in biomedical research

Although non-human primates make up a small percentage of the number of animals used in New South Wales ([0.003% in 2019](#)), their contribution to biomedical research is invaluable. Without the use of primates, none of the [Covid-19 vaccines](#) would have been approved for general use. Primates are also essential in fields where no other animal model would be suitable, due to their similarity to humans. In areas such as [cardiovascular disease](#), [neurological conditions](#), or [reproductive health](#), there is simply no alternative model that can provide answers to fundamental, biomedical questions.

As EARA previously commented in 2016 on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Prohibition of Live Imports of Primates for Research) proposal for legislation (attached in supplementary information), the import of primates for use in research continues to be essential for the Australian biomedical sector. An artificial limit or ban will reduce the stability of primate colonies, and limit research progress.

Alternative methods cannot yet replace animal models

Organoids, 3D cultures of cells and tissues that can replicate organ structures are improving and the technologies are certainly providing more opportunities to reduce the numbers of animals needed in research. While the biomedical research community actively works to reduce the numbers of animals needed in research, we are still a long way from achieving this aim. If we were to ban animal research tomorrow – the sector would simply not be able to develop, produce or safely test any new medicines or vaccines. In future, just as now, non-animal methods might still need to be validated in animal models, and there are areas of basic or behavioural research which might never be completely replaced.



Availability and supply chain issues impact animal welfare

Supply and transport of animals used for scientific purposes are key factors which can impact the welfare and quality of research. The [recent disruption](#) to the Animal Resources Centre in Western Australia, the leading supplier of laboratory mice and rats, will place immense strain on research programmes, or require the import of animals from foreign suppliers. This can have a large impact on the welfare of the animals, now subjected to long journey times. It is therefore in the interest of the whole biomedical research community to ensure easy transport and good supply of animals close to the research institutions that use them for life-saving research.

Covid-19 has shown the world the importance of resilience within healthcare systems, to allow a quick and effective response to public health challenges. By improving the supply chain within Australia, we reduce reliance on other entities in times when it essential to have guaranteed access to resources, such as animals.

In 2020, China [placed a ban](#) on the export of non-human primates from the country for any reason, including for biomedical research. Although this was initially in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the ban has not been lifted since and is having a grave impact on the biomedical research sector worldwide. Companies producing lifesaving vaccines, medicines and research are now seeing delays of up to two years to perform some work, and paying more than three times for the same animals (see briefing for European Commission in supplementary information). The resulting shortage of non-human primates for research is a clear example of the need to build sustainable supply and resources within the nation.

Examples from Europe

In September 2021, a vote in the [European Parliament](#), recognised the important contribution of animals to biomedical research, including vital research during the Covid-19 pandemic, but still called for reduction targets for the number of animals used each year. It is important to stress that the vote did not call for an outright ban, or any specific deadlines on the use of animal research, which has



been incorrectly reported in some areas. Instead, the vote asked for greater commitment to the phase out of animals used for scientific purposes.

The vote has since been [addressed by the European Commission](#), who rejected the calls for faster phase-out of animal research and defended the success of current legislation for the protection of research animals, recognising the role that animal studies continue to play in developing safe and effective drugs and treatments for the benefit of society.

EARA believes that enforcing artificial deadlines on animal use will jeopardise many of the ongoing studies and future of medical research and will gladly give further evidence to support this submission.

Kirk Leech, EARA Executive Director

March 2022