

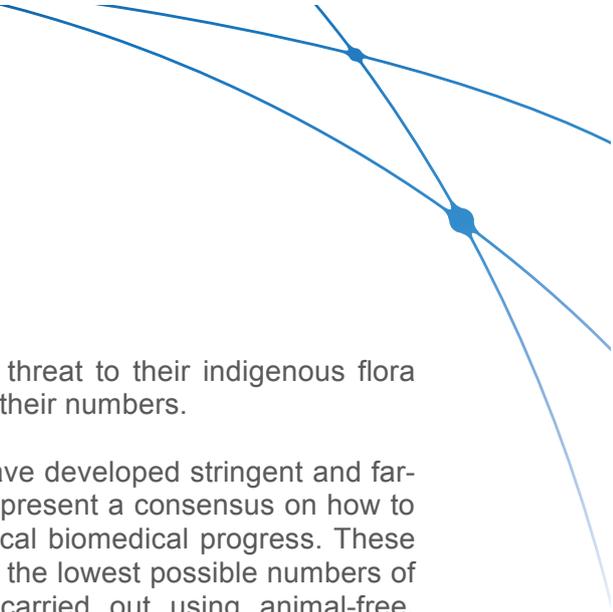
Brussels, 4 February 2016

The Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS), an organization representing 23,000 scientists in 43 European countries, strongly advocates the responsible use of animals in biomedical research. Animal research, including research with non-human primates, continues to be the basis for medical advances that have extended our life expectancy and raised our chances of overcoming or ameliorating life-threatening and debilitating diseases.

Research with non-human primates, because of their physiological similarity to humans, has been a cornerstone of basic neuroscience research and it has led to advances in the treatment of neurological diseases. For example, the prestigious 2014 Lasker Prize for Clinical Research was awarded to Drs Mahlon R. DeLong and Alim Louis Benabid who made critical contributions to the development of the deep-brain stimulation technique used in the treatment Parkinson's disease. This medical breakthrough has helped thousands of Parkinson's patients and would not have been developed had it not been for research on the physiology of a brain structure called the basal ganglia in non-human primates. Non-human primate research has also been critical in many other fields, for example, in the recent development of Ebola vaccine.

FENS views with concern the proposal by Senator Rhiannon to ban the importing of non-human primates that has been made in the context of criticism of scientific research. Although Australia has a few small breeding colonies for non-human primates, these colonies are too small to maintain genetic diversity. Without a suitable supply of new individuals, the animals will soon become inbred and unsuitable for many kinds of research. Australian law already prohibits the importation of animals caught in the wild, and there are government bodies responsible for enforcing such laws. The proposed ban on the importation of lab-bred, non-human primates could be very damaging to Australian science. We therefore urge that this proposed ban not be enacted into Australian law.

The importing of primates into Australia is unlikely to contribute to their extinction in the wild. Not only is it the case that Australian scientists work with animals raised in specialist breeding centres rather than with wild-caught animals but, in addition, environmental agencies and NGOs in exporting countries such as Mauritius identify the



numbers of some wild macaque species as posing a threat to their indigenous flora and fauna and therefore already take measures to limit their numbers.

Modern, knowledge-based and democratic societies have developed stringent and far-reaching animal protection laws and regulations that represent a consensus on how to ensure the best animal welfare while still enabling critical biomedical progress. These laws and regulations require that every experiment use the lowest possible numbers of animals that can be scientifically justified and be carried out using animal-free, alternative methods whenever this is scientifically possible. They also require regular oversight of the research and of animal facilities. Moreover, research funding agencies and professional societies have developed highly selective procedures to fund only the best and most promising research.

We encourage the public, the media and politicians to develop an informed opinion on how best to advance both, animal welfare and biomedical progress.

Monica Di Luca
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