

# Fate of Canada's research monkeys unknown

*Health Canada and animal rights groups debate the future of non-human primate colony*

BY ERIN SPERLING

A monkey colony held by Health Canada is on its last legs.

The fate of 750 macaque monkeys — used for research purposes and kept in small cages for more than a decade — is in question following a ban to stop polio testing on monkeys.

Federal Health minister Alan Rock handed down a moratorium on the use of monkeys in September.

Esther Klein, a spokesperson for the Animal Defense League of Canada (ADLC) says the research was unnecessary and cruel.

"We have lots of data from humans...there is not a valid reason [for testing on monkeys]. The polio vaccine was developed on human diploid cells to see what would happen to humans and they still tested it on monkeys. And at the end of the [research] paper there is a disclaimer that says [the results] can't necessarily be applied to humans because [the subjects] are monkeys.

The ADLC is keen that a sanctuary be created for the animals. It is joined by other animal rights groups including the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, Animal Alliance, Zoocheck Toronto and the Waterloo Public Interest Research Group

Klein says the monkeys have suffered enough.

"It is a tragedy — an absolute appalling disgrace, such mistreatment.

"We hope the least we can do, now [that] we don't need them — the decent thing to do — is to retire them," she said.

Dr. Pierre Thibert, Chief of the Animal Resources Division at Health Canada, disagrees.

"The monkeys will need a multi-acre space with a large fence. They will destroy any vegetation. We will need to vasectomize the young males," he said. "This species is a pest. In Barbados they are a competitor with humans [for resources]. They were being destroyed until the research project was created. It would be costly to maintain them in a sanctuary."

Dr. Thibert says that while the cost of a sanctuary would be less than housing the animals at

Health Canada, there are more practical solutions. One such solution would be the sale of the



monkeys to Canadian corporations, now getting monkeys from Indonesia and the United States, for commercial

research.

"A Canadian firm could rely on the source of non-human primates for testing and research across Canada," Thibert said.

Klein says that money should not be an obstacle to ensuring the monkeys' safety.

"Those who make money from monkeys, who incur benefits from them, also incur the obligations and responsibilities," she said. "Whoever defended and benefited from animal research is responsible [for the monkeys]."

At the request of Health Canada, the Royal Society of Canada (RSC) — a private scientific body — has established

an expert panel to determine the fate of the colony.

The panel has five members; three scientists, one philosopher and one ethicist. Both Thibert and Klein are satisfied with the choice of panel members, however Klein felt a decision should not be made without input from the ADLC.

The final decision of the RSC panel is expected at the end of this month.

130 of the monkeys are still being used for research into an AIDS vaccine and studies on the effects of exposure to heavy metals and pesticides.

"I find it difficult," Thibert said, "we are not using them for the sake of using monkeys, but to alleviate pain and stress in the human population."

# More offshore oil for Nova Scotians

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

A public review will decide whether oil and gas exploration will be allowed to take place in Nova Scotia's George's Bank fishing grounds.

George's Bank is located off the Southern coast of Nova Scotia and is shared between Canada and the United States. It is an enormously productive area, supporting more than 100 species of fish, 18 species of whales, and a variety of sea birds.

A moratorium was placed on petroleum exploration on the

bank in 1988 by both the federal and provincial governments as a result of public concern that arose when Texaco was seeking the go ahead for drilling.

The three person George's Bank Review Panel was established on December 28, 1995 and was appointed by the federal and provincial ministers of Natural Resources at the time, Anne MacLellan and Don Downe. All members have previous environmental and natural resources experience.

The panel has been looking into the potential environmental and socio-economic impacts of

petroleum exploration on the bank. They have until July 1, 1999 to present their report to the ministers of Natural Resources Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. The ministers are then required to make a decision by January 1, 2000.

The Review Panel held public introductory meetings last spring in the Southwestern Nova Scotian communities of Digby, Saunierville, Yarmouth, Barrington, Liverpool, Lunenburg and Halifax. The turnout at these meetings was small, but the groups were constructive. The meetings led to the formation of a Web Site (<http://www.ycn.library.ns.ca/georges/>) to improve communication between the public and the review panel.

The panel went on to hold public information sessions in October, 1997, where they provided the public with background information on the bank, the fishery, the petroleum industry, and applicable federal and provincial legislation.

David Orton, coordinator of the Green Web, an independent research group and network, attended the information session in Halifax. He feels the review is too human centred, focusing on the dollars and cents of the oil and gas industry versus the fishery, as opposed to the potential environmental impacts.

"Basically it was a promotion of the oil and gas industry," said Orton. "There was no discussion at all about global warming or the greenhouse effect."

The burning of fossil fuels is a major contributor of CO<sub>2</sub>, a greenhouse gas, to the

atmosphere.

"They [Review Panels] always rule in favour of the oil and gas industry — for example, the old Sable Gas hearings. This is no different except you have people on [the panel] with some past environmental experience.

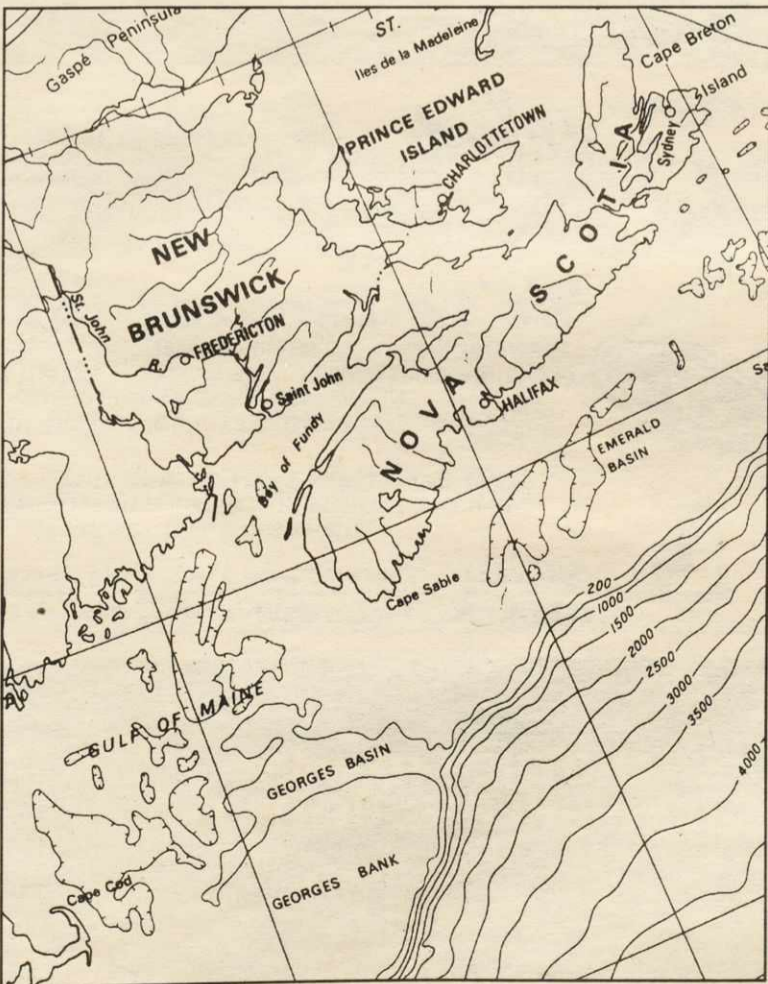
"This is not long term ecological and social sustainability, it is stupidity," said Orton.

"[The environment] is not the point of this particular review," said Rob Porter, co-executive secretary of the George's Bank Review Panel. "It's focused on the exploration and drilling on George's Bank. If the moratorium were to be lifted, whoever drilled would be subject to [an environmental] review."

The Review Panel is currently in the process of reviewing proposals for studies which will provide them with the information they need to assess the situation properly. The panel has a bibliography of 1,364 studies, articles and papers on the George's Bank. On top of this, \$500,000 was made available to them through the Canada-Nova Scotia Fund to commission studies to fill in the gaps in this information. These studies will include subjects such as Global Environmental Implications of Petroleum Production, Hydrocarbon Resources of George's Bank, and Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration.

The panel has not yet received any feedback from the US, who currently has a moratorium on all offshore drilling until 2002.

"I expect there will be some comment in time," said Porter.



George's Bank is located off the southern shore of Nova Scotia.

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