

Bedford Animal Action

**SAY NO TO
NIRAH**

NIRAH ... putting the "Con" into Conservation

A massive new aquarium which will double as a research laboratory is being planned in Bedford.

The National Institute for Research into Aquatic Habitats (NIRAH) project is the brainchild of a group of scientists, and will house thousands of species of freshwater fish, amphibians and reptiles, many of which will be wild-caught. As well as being an aquatic zoo, researchers from the pharmaceutical industry will be able to hire out laboratory facilities on site, to conduct research into the biomedical potential of underwater species. This will include investigating animal toxins, venoms and secretions for use in human medicine.

Studies will also be carried out into the most 'efficient' way to farm certain species for their meat in their native countries. Furthermore, NIRAH backers have admitted that 'surplus' animals will be sold to 'collectors'.

The NIRAH project is being supported by local councils and MPs despite the fact that it will have devastating consequences, not only for the animals forced to live within its confines, but also to local residents who will have to bear the brunt of the negative effects of this development.

Despite this little or no public consultation has been held and the project is being pushed ahead with alarming speed.

If the NIRAH project goes ahead many thousands of animals will suffer as a result:

- Fish and other aquatic creatures fare no better in aquariums than do other animals in zoos. A study commissioned last year by the Captive Animals Protection Society (CAPS) found that 90% of UK public aquaria keep animals who display stereotypic behaviours (abnormal, repetitive behaviour caused by stress) and 74% of aquaria keep animals showing physical health problems.
- NIRAH will not be carrying out non-invasive procedures on animals, *they will be vivisecting them*. Animals will be tortured in order to extract venoms and other secretions, which will then no doubt be further tested on animals. This is unfortunately only the tip of the iceberg.
NIRAH will be providing on-site research facilities in order to attract large pharmaceutical companies. These companies are only interested in profit, and not the suffering of the animals they test on or the welfare of the human beings who eventually suffer from the side effects of the drugs that have been tested for safety by outdated and inaccurate methods.
- Conservation is being used as a cover story by NIRAH to hide their real aim, which is to *make money from animal suffering*. In its recent study CAPS found that 79% of animals had been taken from wild. This could mean, in the case of NIRAH, that thousands of individual animals are taken from their natural habitats.
Currently, huge numbers of animals wild-caught for aquaria do not survive the journey, or die soon after reaching the aquaria, and are replaced with yet more wild-caught individuals.
- CAPS also found that 98% of animals in aquaria did not belong to species classed as threatened.

NIRAH are planning to exhibit a wide variety of fish and other aquatic and semi-aquatic creatures, including amphibians and reptiles such as crater-lake sharks, rainforest tree frogs and giant tortoises, and in fact have not even ruled out keeping mammals such as dolphins, porpoises, whales and seals.

- It is impossible to recreate an exact replica of a natural habitat in captivity and NIRAH's supposed conservation efforts are doomed to failure. The only way to save endangered species is by protecting their natural environment and the threats to these are already well known – and *all inflicted by the actions of humans*.

Local residents will lose out too:

- Traffic congestion is now an issue of national concern. The infrastructure in Bedfordshire is already struggling to cope with the number of vehicles on the roads and the estimated 2 million visitors each year will lead to even further traffic congestion.
- Bedfordshire County Council has been branded as one of the worst in the country, yet is somehow able to afford a £2 million loan to NIRAH to set up this project.
- Water shortages are now commonplace in this country. The many gallons necessary for the NIRAH project, in addition to ongoing needs, will put an increased strain on water supplies.
- The NIRAH project will be far larger than the Eden Project with the domes housing the aquariums covering a total area of 30,000 square metres and being the height of a 30-storey building. This will have a devastating effect on the surrounding towns, villages and countryside and in particular the nearby Marston Vale Community Forest.
- *All aquariums produce toxic waste* which will need to be regularly cleaned from the water. This will put an increasing burden on waste disposal systems that are already struggling to cope with the demands of modern life.

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