

# Correspondence

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## Stop illegal trapping of Spain's songbirds

The European Union's Birds Directive protects 500 or so wild bird species (see [go.nature.com/2m1pcgv](http://go.nature.com/2m1pcgv)). Yet illegal activities such as killing, trapping (pictured) and trading of songbirds continue (see [go.nature.com/2oxjtxu](http://go.nature.com/2oxjtxu)). Malta was convicted in June by the European Court of Justice for allowing trapping. Italy fell into line in 2015, after warnings from the European Commission. Now, the battleground is Spain.

The Spanish government authorized the capture of 1,731,861 finches in 2013–18, presumably to provide a stock of captive-bred birds in case the ban on trapping was ever enforced (see [go.nature.com/2mcg78z](http://go.nature.com/2mcg78z); in Spanish). In May, the European Commission gave Spain a two-month deadline to stop finch trapping altogether. As of 1 June, just 8 of Spain's 17 autonomous regions had suspended the trapping of goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*), greenfinches (*Carduelis chloris*), linnets (*Carduelis cannabina*), serins (*Serinus serinus*) and chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*). If the other regions fail to do the same, Spain could risk fines amounting to millions of euros.

We urge the new Spanish government to take prompt action to save wild songbirds.

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## Don't mix science and beliefs

I was intrigued by Alberto Kornblihtt's premise of using science to explain how facts can influence beliefs (*Nature* 559, 303; 2018). I agree that, as scientists, we should inform people about the complexity of reality, but we must be careful not to impose our own beliefs in doing so.



Scientists have the right to be passionate about their interpretations and convictions — but only as far as their bias is fully disclosed, as Kornblihtt respects. In my view, however, his analogy between an embryo and a mother's organ falls short. In advocating that women seeking abortion should not be held hostage by an organ, he mixes up two separate planes: useful information on embryo development and a moral interpretation that goes well beyond the information provided.

In political discussions, the value of science lies in its ability to provide models. These are our least-subjective interpretations of reality, yet we need to remind ourselves and instil in politicians that they are nevertheless not reality — they are simply useful tools for improving our awareness.

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## Tighten up clinical trial of stem cells

A task force in Japan's health ministry has conditionally approved the world's first clinical trial to treat patients with heart failure, using sheets of heart-muscle cells derived from 'reprogrammed' adult stem cells

(*Nature* 557, 619–620; 2018). In our view, two aspects of the trial protocol need to be addressed before it can be fast-tracked (see also *Nature* 557, 611–612; 2018 and Y. Yui *npj Regen. Med.* 3, 7; 2018).

First, we question the trial's use of allogeneic induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, called iPS stock cells and prepared by Kyoto University's Center for iPS Cell Research and Application. This use of heart-muscle cells from different donors could trigger transplant rejection by the patient. And using immunosuppressants to prevent rejection can cause unpleasant side effects, including a risk of promoting tumour development. We suggest that such risks be minimized by using autologous (that is, the patient's own) iPS cells in the trial instead.

Second, the task force has specified that the trial should involve three participants with "more serious" heart failure than was proposed in the submitted trial protocol. In our view, it would be better to recruit people who are less severely affected, given that the trial's main goal is to establish the procedure's safety. The intervention involves open heart surgery and is medically intensive, so by itself could kill those who are more vulnerable. This would also prevent proper evaluation of the stem-cell treatment.

Addressing these scientific and ethical concerns will ensure that the clinical trial amounts to more than a compassionate rescue attempt.

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## Pakistan needs more reservoirs, and fast

Political indecision is paving the way for a water crisis in Pakistan — and on a scale that affects the whole country, not just a metropolis (see M. Muller *Nature* 559, 174–176; 2018). We urge the incoming Pakistani government to break with a history of procrastination and provide more reservoirs with adequate capacity before it is too late.

Per person, Pakistan has the lowest dam storage capacity in the world (see [go.nature.com/2nfxj7](http://go.nature.com/2nfxj7)). Since identifying potential sites about 40 years ago, successive governments have continued to shy away from constructing new dams because of financial factors and political differences. The country has yet to build a dam large enough to meet its burgeoning water demand.

As Pakistan's partner in the 'Belt and Road' initiative, China can provide lessons on the effective management of water supplies (see, for example, J. Huang and G. Yang *Glob. Food Secur.* 12, 119–126; 2017).

Bold decisions, backed by political, economic and environmental viability, are needed to safeguard the world's sixth-largest population from increasingly severe droughts linked to future climate change.

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