

Canadians see value in zoos, aquariums, but voice support for banning whales and dolphins in captivity

Eight-in-ten say such facilities play an important role in wildlife conservation

May 22, 2018 – The future of zoos and aquariums in North America has come into question in recent years, and two proposed laws to reduce or outright ban cetaceans in captivity, both in the [House of Commons](#) and [Senate](#), appear to reflect the state of public opinion.

Some have called it the “[Blackfish](#)” effect – citing the impact of a popular documentary about the problematic nature of housing intelligent aquatic animals at SeaWorld. SeaWorld Entertainment’s stock [plummeted](#) after the film aired on CNN, and has never recovered to pre-Blackfish levels.

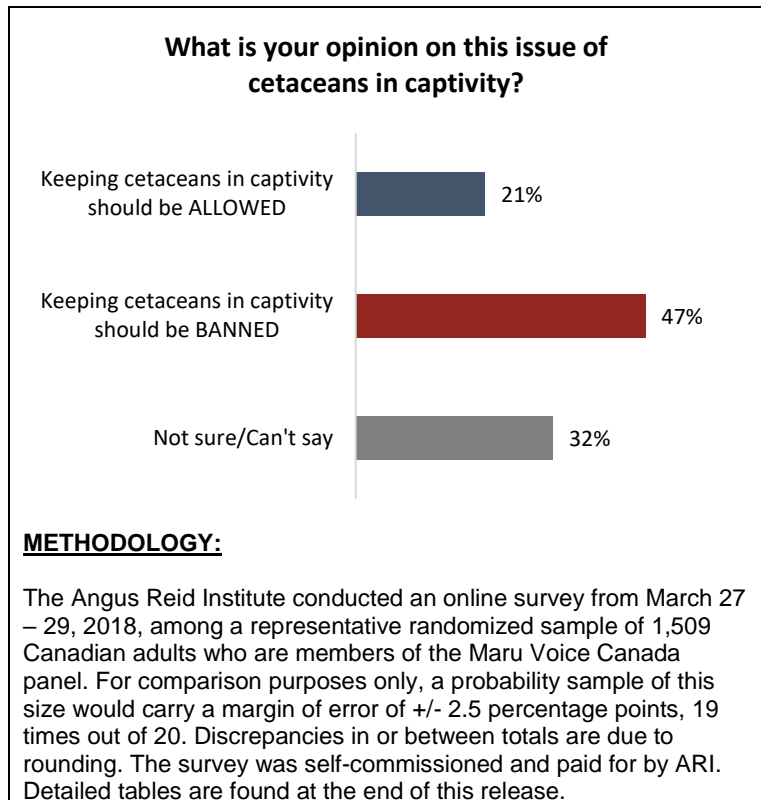
A new study from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians more than twice as likely to say these mammals should be banned from captivity in Canadian aquariums, than to say that this practice should be allowed.

This finding follows [movements in this country](#) against the captivity of cetaceans - whales, dolphins and porpoises - which have been led against Marineland, the popular aquarium and zoo in Niagara Falls, Ontario. In that province, residents are more than three-times as likely to say that such practices should be banned (54%) rather than allowed (15%).

This isn't to say that Canadians do not see value in the work that zoos and aquariums perform. Almost all show appreciation for the role that facilities play in rehabilitation and wildlife conservation and six-in-ten (62%) say that having a zoo or aquarium close by makes a community a better place to live.

More Key Findings:

- In British Columbia, where in 2014 the Vancouver aquarium announced it would no longer house whales and dolphins, residents are much more evenly divided. Two-in-five (40%) say captivity should be banned, while one-in-three say it should be allowed
- More than half of Canadians (56%) disagree that a person can learn the same thing from the television that they would experience at a zoo, and this number rises with increased exposure to these facilities



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- Half of Canadians (50%) say it is wrong to keep an animal in captivity if it is not endangered or injured, but a significant minority (40%) disagree

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Canadians support cetacean ban by two-to-one margin

The regulations involving the housing of dolphins, whales and porpoises have been evolving in recent years. The emergence of [studies](#) showing elevated intelligence and complex social and cultural characteristics have shed light on the potential harms of restricting this type of animal’s environment, and policy-makers have responded to various degrees. Currently, only two facilities in the country house cetaceans – the Vancouver Aquarium, and Marineland in Niagara Falls.

In January of this year, the Vancouver Aquarium announced that it would no longer house whales and dolphins. After years of debate and a Supreme Court battle, aquarium officials stated that they needed to move on from this phase in the facility’s history and focus on [Ocean Wise research and conservation](#).

Notably, the facility will still bring in whales and dolphins in rescue situations and transfer them once rehabilitated. They will also continue to house Helen the Dolphin, who is unfit for transfer or release.

Not everyone was satisfied with the decision. As Andrew Trites, director of the Marine Mammal Research Unit at the University of British Columbia noted, valuable research comes from hosting these animals – research that will now [“mean going elsewhere”](#).



Helen the Dolphin at Vancouver Aquarium

Perhaps due to the public visibility of the debate in B.C. and the statements about the value of housing cetaceans for rehabilitation, residents there are most likely in the country to disagree with a ban on captivity. While four-in-ten (40%) agree that this type of animal should not be held in captivity, one-in-three disagree (35%).

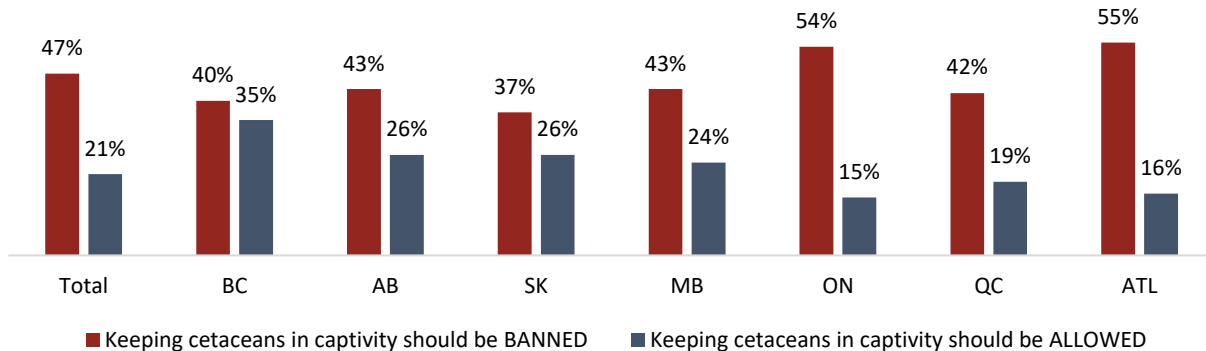
This represents the smallest gap in opinion between those two options across the country.

In Ontario, where Marineland houses [more than 50 cetaceans](#), more than half of residents would like to see a ban, while few (15%) support continuing with captivity.

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What is your opinion on this issue of cetaceans in captivity?

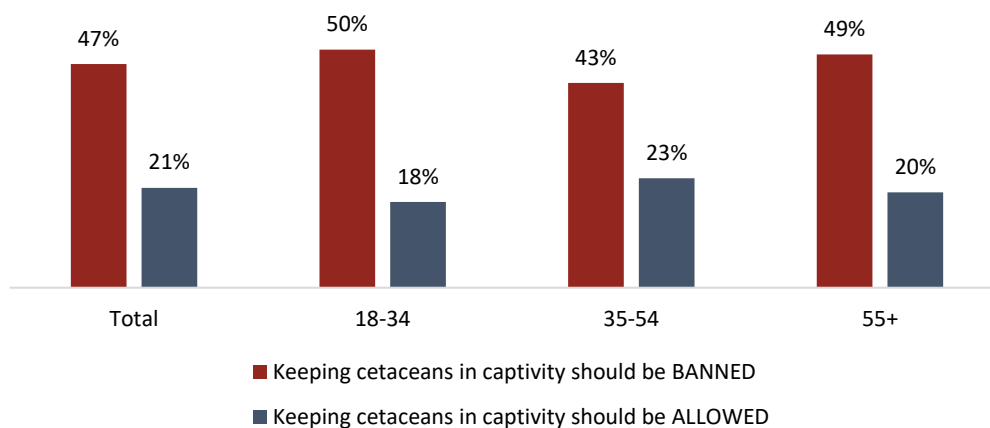


The federal government has also weighed in on this issue. In recent fisheries legislation, [Bill C-68](#), a measure was included to “prohibit the fishing of a cetacean with the intent to take in into captivity”. This regulation however, pertains to Canadian water. The relevance of this move has been [questioned by some](#), given that no cetaceans have been captured for captivity in Canada [since 1992](#).

A bill in the Senate however, [S-203](#), goes a step further, and would ban the import of the animal itself as well as the sperm, or the embryo.

Interestingly, opinions on this issue do not appear to run across definitive generational lines. More than four-in-ten Canadians from each age group say that cetacean captivity should be banned, but this number does not surpass 50 per cent for any of them:

What is your opinion on this issue of cetaceans in captivity?



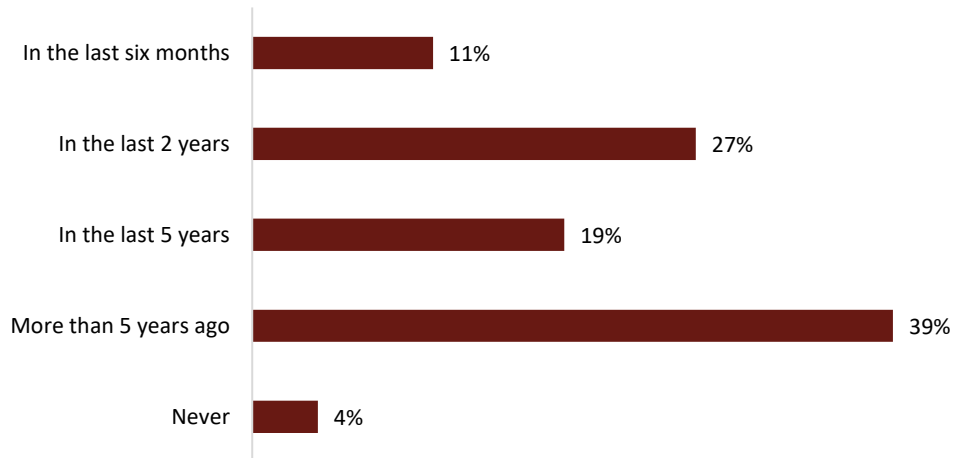
Experience with zoos and aquaria affects opinion

Some of the difference of opinion on animal captivity depend on a person’s recent experience with these facilities. Roughly one-in-ten Canadians (11%) have been to a zoo or aquarium within the past six months, while another quarter (27%) say they have been within the past two years.

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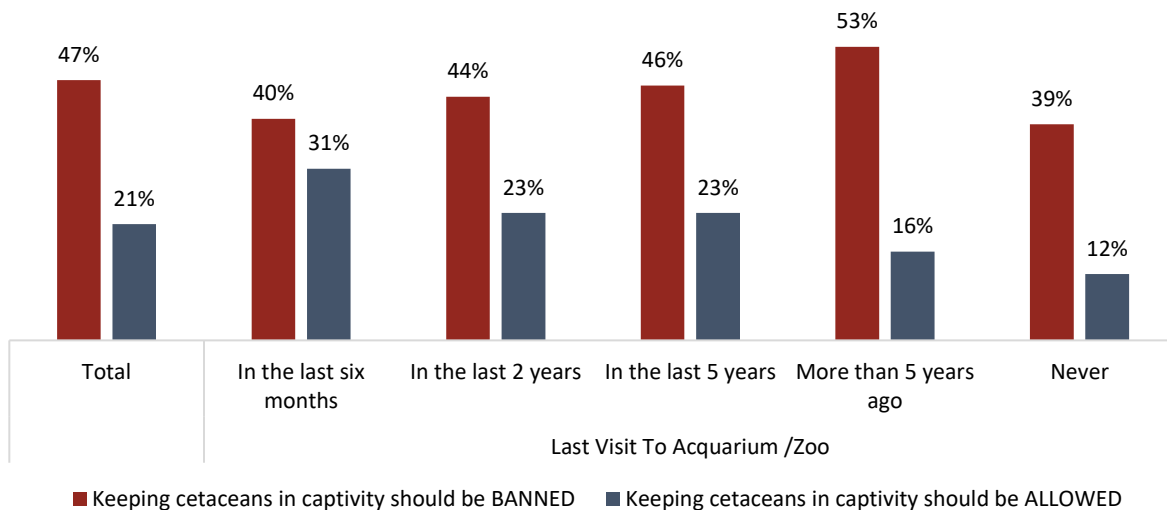
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Last visit to a zoo or aquarium



Comparing the opinions of Canadians based on their recent experience, the Angus Reid Institute finds those who have visited within the last six months are significantly more likely to say that cetaceans should be allowed in captivity. Those most in support of a ban are residents who visited a facility more than five years ago.

What is your opinion on this issue of cetaceans in captivity?



This engagement correlates with a higher perception of value for what zoos and aquaria have to offer. This may be that those who have been to a facility perceive more benefit, or simply that those who perceive more benefit are more likely to visit.

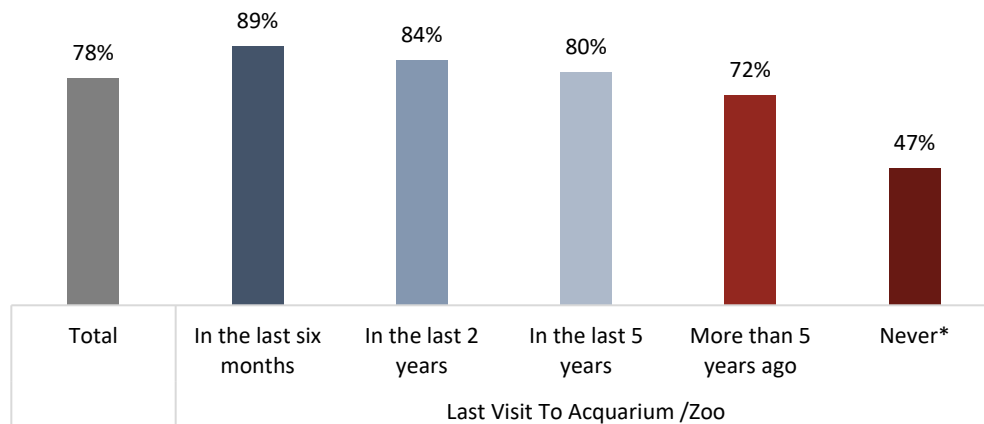
Nine-in-ten Canadians (89%) who have visited one of these facilities within the past six months say that they consider zoos and aquariums an important part of wildlife conservation efforts for species at-risk.

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This drop to below half (47%) for Canadians who have never been to one. Overall, four-in-five Canadians see this conservation value:

**Percentage of Canadians who agree that:
"Zoos and aquariums are an important part of wildlife
conservation efforts"**



*small sample size, n = 66

One recent example of these conservation efforts is at the Calgary Zoo, where four giant pandas were recently received from Toronto, via China on [a ten-year loan program](#). They will stay at the facility in Calgary for five years, and funds raised to view their exhibit will support [further research and conservation efforts](#). Fewer than 2,000 giant pandas have been recorded as living in the wild, as of 2016.



Pandas snuggle at the Calgary Zoo

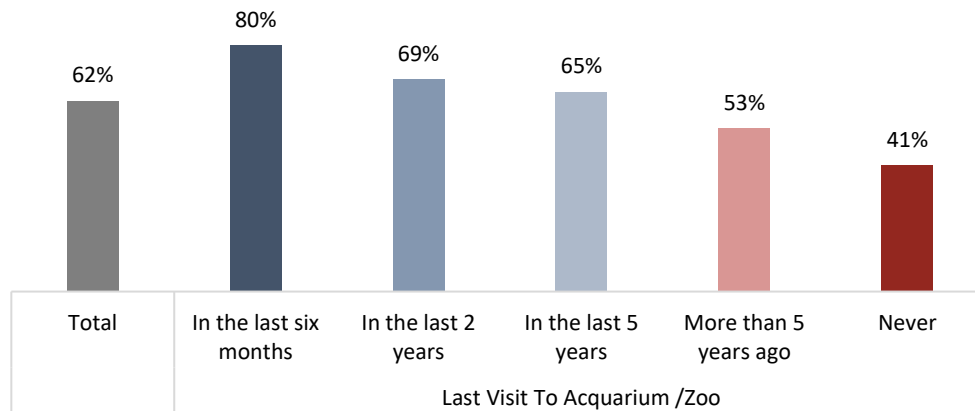
The City of Calgary is expected to generate [\\$16 to \\$18 million 2018](#) due to their presence. The combination of conservation efforts and tourism is perhaps a reason for another opinion held by a

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majority of Canadians – that having a zoo or aquarium in the community makes it a better place to live. Again, those who have more recently visited one of these facilities are more likely to agree with that sentiment:

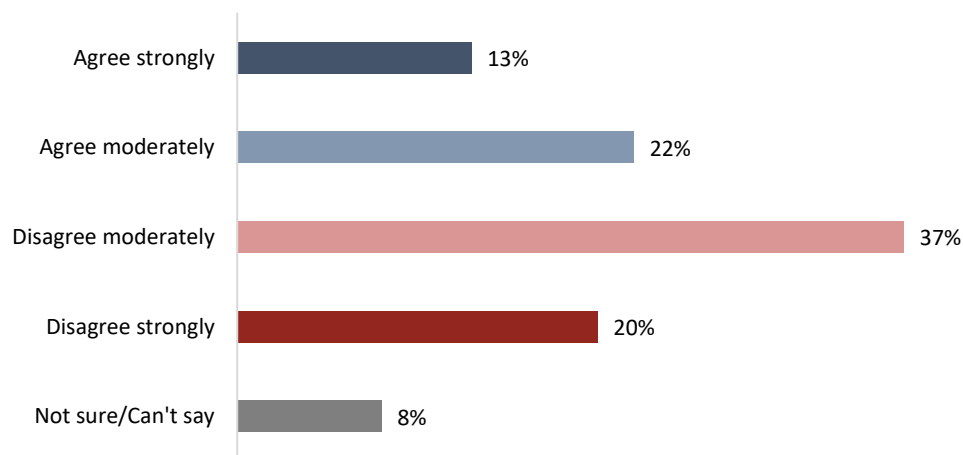
**Percentage of Canadians who agree that:
"Having a zoo or an aquarium makes a community a better place to live"**



Some have argued that the pitfalls of zoos and aquaria, the mistreatment of animals, the lack of appropriate space, mean that people are better off boycotting the facilities and getting the information they want [from documentaries or tv programs](#).

Canadians see these two options as non-equivalent. While one-in-three (35%) agree with this line of thinking, a majority disagree (56%) and say that people cannot get the same value from media as they would from a real life experience with animals:

**Agree or disagree with the following statement:
"Zoos and aquariums don't teach the public anything it couldn't learn from documentary films and TV shows"**



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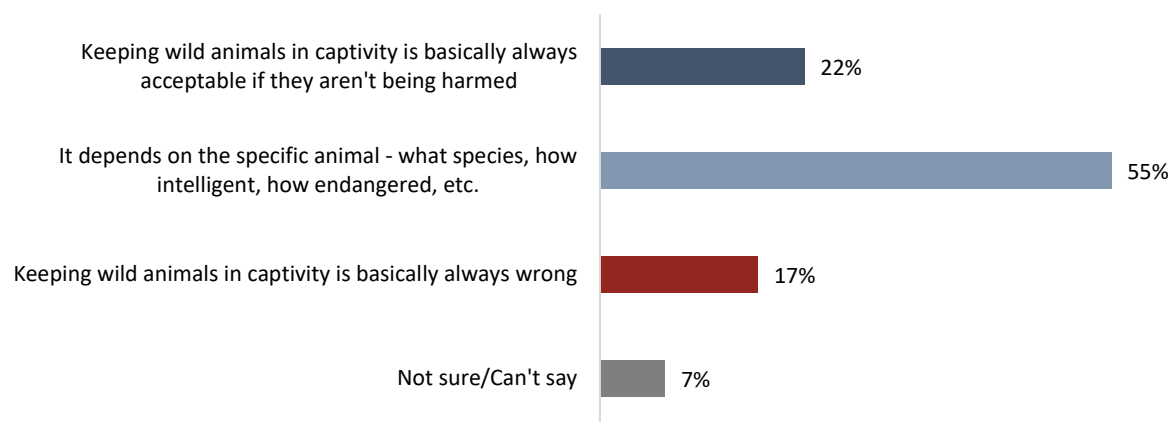
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Support for captivity depends on animal, endangered status

Ultimately, much of the debate about the merits of facilities that house animals comes down to what type of animals are living there. Just one-in-five Canadians (22%) say that keeping animals in captivity is always acceptable, so long as they aren't being harmed. Slightly fewer take the opposite view, that keeping animals in captivity is basically always wrong.

This leaves more than half of Canadians somewhere in the middle. This group, 55 per cent, say that their view depends on what species is being housed, the intelligence of those animals, and whether or not they are endangered.

Which of the following is closest to your view on keeping wild animals in captivity (i.e., in zoos or aquariums)?

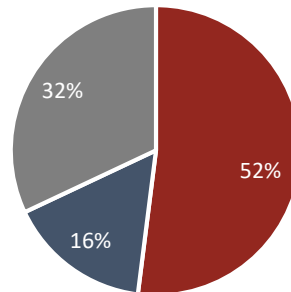


So how does that 'it depends' group feel about cetaceans? Half of them say there should be a ban in place, while just 16 per cent say they are supportive of keeping these mammals in captivity.

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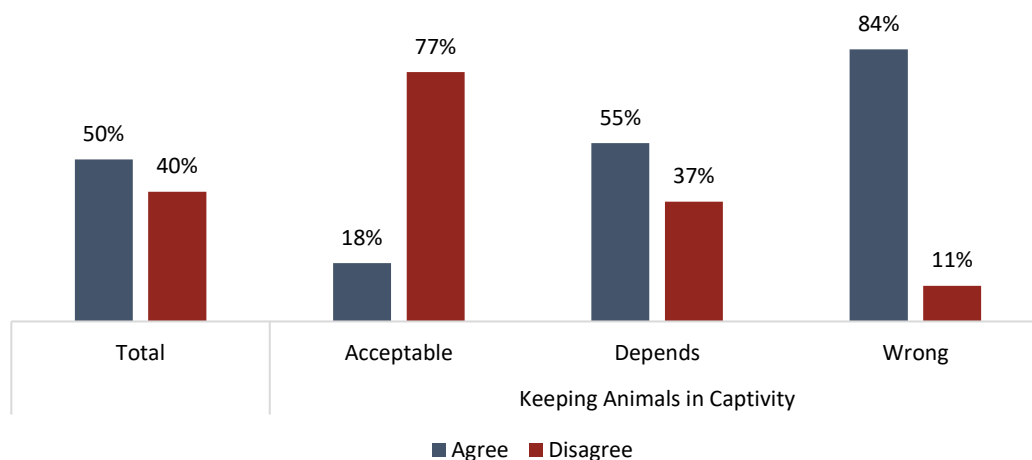
Views of cetacean ban among those who say keeping animals in captivity is neither right nor wrong, but it depends on the animal



- Keeping cetaceans in captivity should be BANNED
- Keeping cetaceans in captivity should be ALLOWED
- Not sure/Can't say

Further, a majority in this 'it depends' group (55%) are also motivated by the idea that animals that are not endangered or injured should not be held in captivity. This is a much more significant factor for the group who say that keeping animals in captivity is always wrong:

Agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is wrong to keep any animal in captivity if it isn't hurt or endangered"

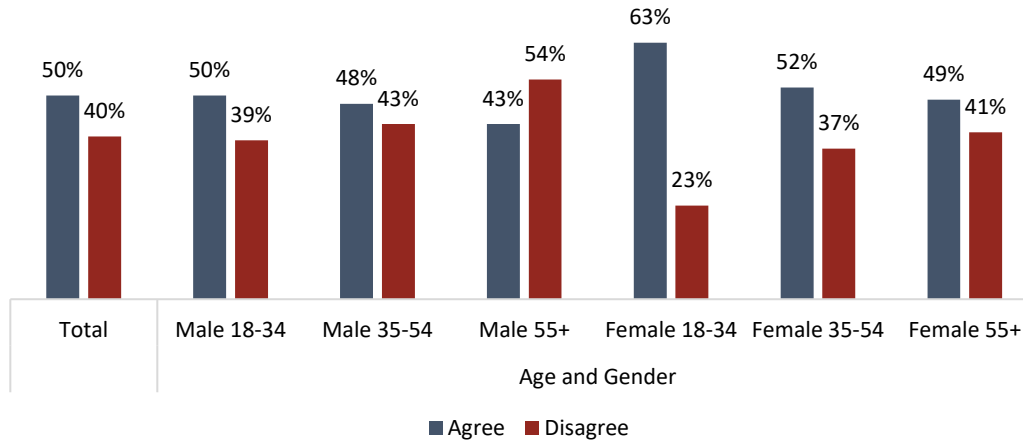


Notably, opinions on the acceptability of keeping animals in captivity differs by both age and gender. Women are generally more likely to say that this practice is wrong unless animals are injured, and younger women, age 18 to 34, say the highest level of any age/gender cohort:

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Agree or Disagree with the following statement: "It is wrong to keep any animal in captivity if it isn't hurt or endangered"



The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by engagement with zoos/aquarium, [click here](#).

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