

Brussels, 31 March 2009

MEPs gear up for historic vote to decide future of millions of laboratory animals

Citizens across the EU are eagerly awaiting the results of an historic vote to be taken by Members of the European Parliament this afternoon. The vote in the Parliament's Agriculture Committee will undoubtedly decide the fate of how laboratory animals are to be treated for years to come.

Twenty-three years after the introduction of the EU's directive for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, the EU is finally revising the outdated rules that have determined how animal testing may be carried out. The revision follows clear signals from EU citizens, whose calls for the reduction in the number of animals used for research have been multiplying steadily. With the development of new alternatives to animal testing also came new calls for restricting of the use of animals in research.

Eurogroup for Animals is concerned that the calls for the better protection for laboratory animals may be in vain as some MEPs have been tempted by the industry and research lobbies to water down the Commission proposal so as to keep animal testing as easy as possible. This would be in sharp contrast to the EU's firm stance dedicated to reducing the number of animals used and replacing animal test with alternatives.

Eurogroup is specifically concerned that some MEPs will allow:

- The continued use of animals in training and education, when good alternatives exist which do not require animals;
- Procedures which cause severe suffering;
- The continued use of primates with no consideration for the setting up of a strategy to phase out the use of these animals;
- The care and accommodation standards to become mere guidelines when the Commission proposal had envisaged for them to be a binding requirement;
- International acceptance to be granted before alternative methods may be put to use, hereby seriously delaying the possibility to use methods which have already been validated in the EU.

Eurogroup urges the members of the Agriculture Committee to do the right thing by voting for amendments which will seriously reduce the number of animals to be used in research. These amendments will allow for the retaining of the quality of EU research and competitiveness, but will ensure better protection for animals and citizens alike.

- ENDS -

For more information call Liesbet Dendas, information officer at Eurogroup, on 0032 (0)2 7400890 or email her on l.dendas@eurogroupforanimals.org.

Notes:

- Eurogroup for Animals represents animal welfare organisations in nearly each of the EU member states. Since it was launched in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the European Union to adopt higher legal standards of animal protection. For more information about Eurogroup, visit www.eurogroupforanimals.org.
- Over 12 million animals are used for research each year. Some animals are exposed to severe pain in order to test the safety of products, to be used as training tools or to be used in basic research with no clear view of its outcome.
- Eurogroup for Animals feels that all procedures that entail animal use should be scrutinized carefully and that authorisation for such use should only be given after careful consideration of the harm it will do to the animals and the clear benefit it will provide for human health. The use of animals such as primates that only genetically differ to humans by a few percent and wild caught animals should not be permitted and the use of these animals should be phased out entirely.
- The reliance on the international acceptance of alternative methods is extremely worrying as it will delay the uptake of scientifically accepted alternative methods unnecessarily, due to the bureaucracy and decision making processes of international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). A time frame prepared by an expert panel (ECVAM, 2005) illustrates that it takes at least five additional years for tests to be accepted by the OECD, on top of the 6 – 10 year-long validation process foreseen by the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM).