

Brussels, 5 May 2009

Parliament decision on new rules for animal testing: missed opportunity!

During a momentous vote in the European Parliament, EU parliamentarians have overwhelmingly voted in favour of better protection measures for laboratory animals. The Parliament has, however, only taken a rather cautious approach, restricting animal use without groundbreaking progress.

MEPs voted to adopt the European Commission's proposal to revise the outdated 1986 EU directive on the use of animals in research, amended by the report of Neil Parish (EPP-ED, UK).

Sonja Van Tichelen, Director of Eurogroup For Animals, sees the decision as a step forward but a missed opportunity: "What we need is a U-turn in research to drastically reduce and finally replace the use of animals. For this, we need a different mindset and an overarching European strategy on animal testing with clear targets, replacing the most controversial tests such as those that make use of primates. This law, by itself, will not be sufficient but it will provide an adequate starting point."

The principle of replacing, refining and reducing animal testing was central to today's decision with the focus on the promotion and development of alternatives without animal use. Member States and the EU will need to invest more in alternatives research while an authorisation process which includes an ethical review will have to be set up to ensure alternatives are used whenever available. Increased transparency regarding the numbers and reasons for animal testing will make researchers more accountable to the public.

Animal testing is highly controversial and opposed by a large majority of European citizens, a view also supported by many in the Parliament. However, some MEPs have voted against much-needed improvements due to claims that overregulation will damage research into human medicines and false fears that research will leave the EU.

These pressures have resulted in the weakening the proposed authorisation procedure (which would have put a stop to tests which cause severe suffering) and have taken away a wonderful opportunity to phase out the use of primates.

Dr. Kirsty Reid, Eurogroup For Animals' Policy Officer for Research Animals, regrets the Parliament's unwillingness to restrict primate research, but is relieved that the discussion can now continue with Member States: "For the millions of research animals, every day is a day too many and we are now looking to the Council to provide a constructive debate and adoption."

Dr. Reid shares Environment Commissioner Dimas' view that the aim of protecting animals and promoting research are not contradictory goals: "Ultimately, we want better protection for animals and people through better science as alternatives are simply offering more reliable results", according to Dr. Reid.

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For more information call Kirsty Reid, Policy Officer Research Animals at Eurogroup, on 0032 (0)2 7400820 or e-mail her on k.reid@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.