

Brussels, 27 August 2009

## Safe shellfish without suffering

**A report this week by food scientists casts even more doubt on the need for the controversial and agonising tests for biotoxins in shellfish still being carried out on mice and rats in the EU.**

Mouse (MBA) and rat (RBA) bioassays are inadequate to ensure human health, as they are an ineffective method of determining the presence of toxins. They are contentious animal tests that have death as an endpoint, in which mice and rats are injected with extracts from molluscs and the time until death, usually from paralysis of the respiratory muscles, is recorded.

The European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) assessment [1], which was requested by the European Commission, contains detailed opinions on six different types of toxins that are found in shellfish and are produced by algae. Some of these toxins are highly toxic to humans and can lead to gastrointestinal and neurotic illness, and even death. The report states that the tests are not considered an appropriate tool for determining the presence of toxins, when there are numerous alternative non-animal methods that are rapid, selective and more efficient.

Eurogroup for Animals is now calling on the Commission to respond to the scientists' findings and remove the obligation to use bioassays for shellfish toxins, as consumer safety can now be guaranteed without cruelty. New Zealand and Germany, for example, have successfully analysed shellfish for toxins for many years using non-animal methods.

Eurogroup Director Sonja Van Tichelen said: *"We have been calling for the abolition of this dreadful test for years – the bioassay is extremely painful and should be replaced with non-animal alternatives. Very reliable, highly sensitive and highly reproducible alternatives to the bioassay have been in force since the 1980s, and include chemical assays or biological test methods such as cell-culture tests."*

- ENDS -

**For more information, contact:**

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**Notes:**

- Eurogroup for Animals represents animal welfare organisations of nearly all EU Member States. Since its launch in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the EU to adopt higher legal standards for animal protection. Eurogroup represents public opinion through its membership organisations across the Union, and has both the scientific and technical expertise to provide authoritative advice on biotechnology issues relating to animal welfare. For more information, visit [www.eurogroupforanimals.org](http://www.eurogroupforanimals.org)
- [1] Scientists at the EFSA concluded that eating shellfish contaminated with marine biotoxins from the yessotoxin or pectenotoxin groups at levels permitted in the European Union was not considered to pose any health risk. However, experts on the Panel on contaminants in the food chain (CONTAM) said in an opinion that people consuming shellfish contaminated with toxins from the okadaic acid, azaspiracid, saxitoxin or domoic acid groups could be at risk. The experts identified 400g as a realistic estimate of a large portion of shellfish and used this in assessing current permitted levels of the toxins. Based on these calculations, however, people eating a smaller portion of shellfish contaminated with toxins from the okadaic acid,

azaspiracid, saxitoxin or domoic acid groups could also experience ill effects, such as diarrhoea and vomiting.

[http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa\\_locale-](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1211902813132.htm?WT.mc_id=EFSAHL01&emt=1)

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