

INFORMATION

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EU institutions urged to make new animal experimentation law a priority

Eurogroup for Animals calls on the European Parliament and the Council to take up discussions of the long-awaited proposal for a new directive on animal experimentation announced today as a matter of priority. If the new proposal is not discussed in Parliament by the time of the next European elections in June 2009, the legislation risks being significantly delayed.

Eurogroup director Sonja Van Tichelen said: "Every day this new legislation is not enacted, thousands more animals will suffer. This new proposal has been eagerly awaited for years and any further delay would be simply unacceptable."

The Commission, which published the proposal today, has been working on the revision of directive 86/609/EEC since 2002 and its publication was delayed several times this year. With existing legislation dating from 1986 it is high time to consider new scientific developments as well as the ever growing concern of EU citizens about animal testing. In a public consultation, 93% of respondents said more needs to be done to improve the level of welfare/protection of animals used in experiments by action at EU level.

Every year more than 12 million animals are used but not all receive the same legal protection. The EU rules do not cover animals used in education and training, which account for about one third of all animal used in experimentation. There is no harmonised process to authorise animal research in the member states. Some tests are duplicated or could have been replaced by non-animal alternative test methods

Director Van Tichelen continued: "Our aim is to see a steady reduction in the number of animals used in the EU by making the authorisation process as strict as possible and by promoting alternatives. Some tests such as for educational purposes or the use of primates should not be carried out at all. Where animals continue to be used they deserve the highest level of care and appropriate housing."

Eurogroup further calls on the EU to take leadership in the development and uptake of non-animal alternatives methods. The Commission should strengthen the mandate

of European Centre for Alternatives (ECVAM). With its ever declining budget ECVAM is currently not in the position to carry out its role and deliver the much needed validated alternatives.

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Notes:

- Eurogroup for Animals represents animal welfare organisations in nearly each of the European 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.
- The number of animals used for testing in the EU has increased from 9.8 million in 1999 to 12.1 million in 2005.
- ECVAM has validated 28 alternative methods since it was set up in 1991. Most of them were approved in the last six years.
- The Commission held a public consultation online on the new directive in 2006, which received the third largest number of responses ever. In the consultation 93 % of respondents answered either "Yes, certainly" or "Yes, probably" to the question "Do you believe that more needs to be done to improve the level of welfare/protection of animals used in experiments by action at EU level?". Also 79% did not think there was enough public funding at European level for the development and validation of alternative methods to replace animal experimentation. And 93% agreed the EU should take the lead internationally in promoting animal welfare, especially when it came to animals used in testing and research.