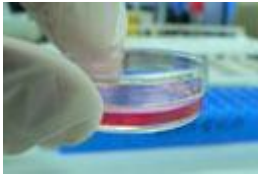


House of Lords report calls for animal research reform



A report by the House of Lords European Union Committee¹ published 10 November, calls on the UK government to support efforts to update EU law on animal experiments² including an end to experiments causing severe animal suffering, restrictions on non-human primate research to end their use in trivial experiments, and phasing out the use of wild-caught primates. The report has today been welcomed by the Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research (DHT) as *“a clear signal that EU animal experiments policy needs to be more ambitious and progressive if animals are to be protected from unrestrained use in laboratories.”*

The House of Lords EU Committee launched its inquiry in April 2009 into the draft revision of the 20-year old EU Directive 86/609 on animal experiments. The European Commission published proposed improvements to the law in November 2008 but sustained pressure from industry lobbyists has seen the weakening of key animal welfare and ethical review provisions as the draft has been debated in Brussels.

One major loss in the political negotiations so far was Commission proposals that sought to end the use of non-human primates for arguably trivial purposes such as eye preference tests and maternal deprivation studies. When MEPs voted in May this year they failed to support this proposal, but the Lords’ report now clearly endorses an end to using these highly sentient animals for experiments not relating to life-threatening or debilitating human conditions.

In many respects the Committee report, based on wide-ranging consultation with stakeholders such as the pharmaceutical industry, academia, non-animal alternatives experts including the Dr Hadwen Trust, and animal protection groups, explicitly supports the Commission’s original vision. In so doing it recommends the UK government supports many of the key welfare clauses that MEPs and Member State Ministers have so far failed to retain.

The Committee has concluded:

- The revision of the EU animal experiments Directive is much needed.
- Experiments causing severe animal suffering should be banned⁴
- Experiments on non-human primates should only be permitted for life-threatening or debilitating human conditions
- Full authorisation including mandatory ethical review, should apply to all proposed animal experiments across the EU. Enhanced ethical review should be required if use of primates is proposed.
- The use of F1 generation (wild-caught) primates should be phased out on a species-by-species case.

- Improved care and accommodation standards (such as checking animals daily and increasing cage space) proposed in the new Directive are supported.

The Dr Hadwen Trust, the UK's leading non-animal medical research charity, presented oral evidence to the Committee in July³.

“The Dr Hadwen Trust welcomes today’s report as a clear signal that EU animal experiments policy needs to be more ambitious and progressive if animals are to be protected from unrestrained use in laboratories and if regulation is to encourage greater scientific and ethical scrutiny.” says Dr Gemma Buckland from the Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research. *“At a time when there is abundant evidence of the deficiencies of animal research and the scientific advantages of more modern non-animal methods, a new strategic vision is needed to improve medical research by ultimately replacing animal use and the Committee’s recommendations make a significant contribution to that. We urge the British Government to now commit itself enthusiastically to promoting these recommendations in the Brussels negotiations.”*

The House of Lords EU Committee enquiry was set up as part of the Parliamentary scrutiny process, to provide an opinion and recommendations to the government on what the UK position should be in political negotiations in Brussels. Although there is no legal requirement on the government to adopt the Committee’s position, in practice they will be under pressure to demonstrate how they have been taken into account. The report will then be debated in the House, giving further opportunity for comment.

The Dr Hadwen Trust is one of the leading groups working to update Directive 86/609 and is calling for an EU-wide strategy to vastly increase investment in new non-animal replacement methods. The charity funds medical research at British universities to develop new non-animal techniques to replace live animals, such as 3-D models of disease, advanced human brain imaging techniques and computer modelling.

First Reading of revision proposals took place in the European Parliament in May this year. Member State experts in the Council of Ministers are now producing a common position. It is expected that the Council and the Parliament will reach agreement before the end of this year but if agreement is not reached, the Parliament will hold a full second reading debate during 2010.

Notes:

¹ Sub-Committee D, chaired by Lord Sewel, is one of the European Union Select Committee’s seven Sub-Committee’s. The Sub-Committee deals with all aspects of the EU’s agricultural and environmental policies. The Committee’s report can be read [here](#).

² Proposals to revise Directive 86/609/EEC were published by the European Commission in November 2008 – the Commission’s proposals can be read [here](#).

³ Listen to the Dr Hadwen Trust’s oral evidence session by Emily McIvor and Dr Gemma Buckland [here](#) (following after the first session by the NC3Rs).

⁴ Statistics on suffering for the EU are not available but in the UK there were 99 project licences granted in 2008 covering 3.656million animal procedures. The licences were: 38 mild suffering, 58 moderate suffering and three substantial suffering. There is no data in the public domain on the number of individual procedures represented by each category. However as all 3.656million procedures using 3.583million animals are divided into just 99 project licences, three licences in the highest category of suffering could involve a significant number of animals.