

Back to the Middle Ages

EU Lab Rules: Campaign update

Animal Defenders International- www.ad-international.org

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Following its vote in 1st reading in the European Parliament, the new Directive on animal experimentation moved to the Council of Ministers, where all Member States of the EU can also have their say on the European Commission's draft.

Before it can be enforced in the EU, any Directive has to be approved by both the **Council of Ministers** and the **European Parliament**. This is an opportunity to roll-back some of the worst amendments voted by MEPs last May. Indeed some of them dangerously undermine the existing legislation of many countries, including the UK.

For instance, the Rapporteur Neil Parish passed an amendment **scrapping the need for authorisation for all experiments classified as 'mild'**, and replacing it by a simple administrative notification. About **4 millions animals a year** in Europe would fall into the scope of this dreadful amendment. It was adopted by the MEPs despite the fact that the vast majority of Member States do implement a full authorisation system already. This shows that the scaremongering campaign of disinformation as to the 'regulatory burden' of animal testing led by pharmaceutical industries like **Astra Zeneca**, had a strong impact on the elected representatives.

If a modification of the Directive such as this one is accepted by the Council of Ministers, there a strong risk that some Member States might start deregulating animal testing, sending Europe back to the dark ages of both science and ethics. It is vital to ensure that Member States defend their standards in the Council against the deregulatory hysteria of lobbyists from the industry with vested interests and a narrow sector of the academia.

[...] Last July, the **Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate annual report 2007** revealed how the Home Office is making it easier for laboratories to experiments on animals. Their target is *"a headline 25% reduction in the administrative burden to licensees by 2010 and a number of interim targets."* Measures include *"fast-tracking certain types of personal licence application"*, and simplifying *"paperwork"*.

These developments are very worrying, especially when better regulation is needed more than ever. Figures published by the Home Office in July show that **3.65 million procedures** were carried out in 2008 in UK laboratories, **up 14%** on 2007. The numbers of animals used were **3,583,223**, an increase of 457,397. The number of animals used has increased for 7 years in a row: **a shocking 39% increase since 2001**.

The annual inspectorate report announces that a lobbying unit has been created at the Home Office to implement the deregulatory programme at the EU level. We must not let

the Home Office attempt to take advantage of the lack of transparency of the EU legislative process to implement its agenda behind the back of the British public.

Importantly, this Directive should be regarded as a minimum standard across Europe. It is an improvement but in most areas it sets a very basic standard. Indeed several member states already have higher standards in certain areas. It is therefore baffling why MEPs chose not to ensure that the directive explicitly encouraged member states to aspire to the highest possible standards. When it is implemented at national level ADI will urge Member States to go beyond the minimum requirements of the directive and adopt pro-active policies to replace the use of animals in laboratories.