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Adoption by European Commission likely in near future

The first part of the revision process, in which the European Commission adopts its proposal for the new directive, is likely to be completed in the next few months

During the lengthy process involved in the revision of Directive 86/609, observers have been watching closely to estimate when the European Commission will adopt the proposal. Once the proposal for the revision of the directive has been adopted by the Commission, it has to be sent to both the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, which are responsible for its adoption through the co-decision procedure. This takes, on average, about three years.

Now that the Commission is consulting the Member States about the wording of key sections (see article below), it is clear that we are only a few months away from the Commission adopting the proposal. It is widely expected that the Commission will aim for adoption during the German Presidency, which lasts until the end of June 2007.

The EU Presidency means, in reality, the presidency of the EU Council of Ministers. Each country, when it takes on the six-month presidency, sets out its manifesto of political priorities. If something is not amongst these priorities, there may not be an available space on the agenda of the Council of Ministers to introduce a new item, meaning that the formal legislative process becomes stalled. Germany is known to place animal welfare issues relatively high amongst its priorities.

The Coalition expands

We are pleased to welcome eight more associations that have joined the European Coalition for Biomedical Research since it was launched.

The European Coalition for Biomedical Research now has 42 associations and institutions as members, from 19 Member States, with a joint membership of over 44,000 scientists.

We welcome the following associations who have joined since the Coalition was launched:

Biosciences Federation
Dutch Physiological Society
European Brain Council
European Neuroendocrine Association

Experimental Psychology Society
Institute of Animal Technology
Spanish Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
Spanish Society of Physiological Sciences

🔗 Commission discusses wording for the new Directive

At a closed meeting held by the European Commission the proposed wording for parts of the new Directive was discussed

The European Commission holds regular meetings of the government officials from the Member States who are responsible for the implementation of Directive 86/609/EEC on animal experimentation. A group of key stakeholder associations, which includes EBRA, are invited to attend these meetings as observers.

The most recent of these meetings was held in January and much of it was about the revision of the Directive. The main public consultation was carried out over the summer but, in the spirit of transparency, the Commission officials provided the participants with a working paper outlining the main elements and giving initial suggestions for the wording of certain key parts of the new Directive. The Member States and stakeholder groups were asked to provide comments and feedback. The Commission made it clear that the suggested wording was preliminary and they expected some of it to change as a result of the comments received.

Many of these initial proposals follow the ideas suggested in the preliminary impact assessment which was used for the expert consultation in July and August 2006. Although there have been some improvements, there are still a significant number of matters of concern for the academic research community and we will continue to press the Commission for these to be addressed.

The restricted status of the working paper means that we cannot discuss the specific points in this article, but EBRA is in the process of consulting its fellow members of the European Coalition for Biomedical Research and will provide the Commission with a response reflecting their comments.

🔗 Results of the public consultation

The Commission have released the results of the public consultation about the revision of the Directive, which contain few surprises

The results of the public and expert consultations on the revision of Directive 86/609, published by DG Environment just before Christmas, hold few surprises. 42,655 responses were received to the public consultation, from all 25 EU Member States, as well as from other countries. This was the third largest number of responses ever to a Commission internet consultation, said a spokesman, adding that this showed that there was considerable public interest in the area and that many people wanted the Commission to act to improve the welfare of animals.

93% of the 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 at EU level?" 79% answered either "No, certainly not" or "No, probably not" to the question "Do you think that there is enough public funding at European level (e.g. EU Framework Programmes for research) into the development and validation of alternative methods to replace animals experiments?"

92% of respondents thought that the EU should lead in promoting a greater awareness of animal welfare and protection on the international stage,

particularly when it came to experimental animals.

The vast majority of respondents were young (69.9% under 40 years of age), and 74.4% female. Germany, UK, Finland and Italy topped the list of responders, with 59.2% of the total, while Poland, Slovenia, Ireland, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Greece, Luxembourg, Romania, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Slovakia only mustered 4% between them.

The results of the expert questionnaire, to which there were 283 replies, giving over 12,000 specific comments, are still being analysed by DG Environment and will inform the draft legislation. However, according to the Commission, there was most agreement on issues such as scope, ethical evaluation of projects, ethical review process at establishments, EU inspections, requirements for training and competence, and statistical reporting. The least agreement was found on issues such as links between high animal welfare and decreased risk of violent extremist activity, CO2 anaesthesia, and the basis of impact calculations for purpose-bred F2 primates.

The full text of all the responses to the expert version of the questionnaire is available on the Commission web site at:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/lab_animals/questionnaire2.htm

Written Declaration fails to make it

A Written Declaration calling for a ban on primate research fails to get even close to the necessary number of MEP signatures

A 'Written Declaration' tabled by five MEPs on behalf of an animal rights group, calling for the revised version of Directive 86/509 to contain a phasing out on all experiments on primates over the next six years, failed to reach the requisite number of signatures for inclusion in a plenary session of the European Parliament.

On 18 January, the declaration, tabled by Robert Evans, Paulo Casaca, David Martin, Sajjad Karim and Carl Schlyter, had only 88 signatures, a long way from the 393 needed to take it further. The declaration noted that: "primates have a high level of intelligence, being the closest relative to humans, with certain species such as chimpanzees sharing 98% of human DNA", and that: "..... the very existence of primates is being threatened by the bushmeat, laboratory, entertainment and pet trades."

This Written Declaration was publicised by Animal Defenders International - an off-shoot of the UK's National Anti-Vivisection Society, as part of their International Primate Day campaign. In addition to asking the Commission to phase out all primate experiments, it also called for the prohibition of chimpanzee use and the use of wild-caught primates.

Written declarations may be submitted by a group of up to five MEPs by presenting a text to be signed by their colleagues. If signed by a majority of MEPs, it is forwarded to the President of the Parliament, who announces it in a plenary session. It is then forwarded to the institutions named in the text, together with the names of the signatories, and published in the minutes of the session.