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The EU must think again on animal research

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Commission's inexpert, untransparent committee has produced a one-sided and unscientific inquiry into the use of animals for research.

The European Coalition to End Animal Experiments (ECEAE) along with numerous other animal protection, medical research and patient safety organisations representing millions of supporters in Europe and further afield has submitted a formal complaint about the inquiry set up by the European Commission into the use of non-human primates in research and humane alternatives to it.

The inquiry followed a recent scientific report by ECEAE and a written declaration by the European Parliament in 2007, signed by no fewer than 433 MEPs, calling for a time-tabled phasing-out of non-human primates in research (and an immediate ban on the use of great apes). Apart from the enormous suffering experienced by animals, at all stages of their lives, there are fundamental questions about their utility as research models, because of their physiological differences to people.

Inexplicably, the Commission's health directorate chose a committee – the Scientific Committee Health and Environmental Risks – with no expertise in the use of non-human primates in research (its remit is the safety of chemicals). The committee has since refused to say whom it appointed to a working group. The Commission compounded its error by failing to ask the committee the most basic question of all – whether the current use of non-human primates in research actually works. As a result, the committee's draft report simply assumes that it does, in the face of extensive evidence that it often does not. The draft report then sets the bar extremely high for alternatives before they can, in its view, be judged fit to replace the use of non-human primates in research.

The Commission has announced its proposal for the long-awaited revision of the animal experiments directive. It would be a tragedy, for human health as much as for animal protection, were policy to be driven by such a one-sided and wholly unscientific inquiry. The EU should deal only in evidence-based science, not unsupported claims and scaremongering by those with a vested interest in the continued use of non-human primates in research. We urge the Commission to think again.

From:

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