

Lecture: revision of the Directive 86/609/EEC & national reference laboratories

Making the EU Directive 86/609/EEC work for animals

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The EU Directive 86/609/EEC on the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes is the key piece of legislation covering the scientific use of animals in the European Union. The Directive has not been changed since 1986 and both animal use and animal protection communities are in agreement that it requires revision. This is primarily because the use of animals has diversified since the creation of the Directive, in particular with a dramatic increase in genetically modified animals being used (1.4 million being used in the UK alone in 2005).

The lengthy process that the Directive has gone through since 2001, when revision was first suggested, will be described; including the outcomes of public consultations, expert impact assessments as well as reports by the Scientific Committees on the Scope of the Directive and the Use of Primates. The key area of debate appears to be on the use of primates and the extent to which this should be restricted; extending the scope of the Directive to include animals used in basic research and teaching is already hoped to have been agreed by the Commission. Subject to release by the Commission, the key components of the Draft will be discussed from the point of view of the animal protection movement. From our perspective it is imperative that this Directive doesn't just harmonise laboratory animal protection to the level of current best practice but becomes a Directive that has animal protection at its heart. One significant improvement would be to set targets for a reduction in the numbers of animals used in the European Union, currently at a record high of 12.1 million animals.

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