ACTION ON MONKEY EXPERIMENTS

Ten years after European Parliament Declaration calls for phase-out of primate experiments, the time is right to step up the pressure

Following a blistering campaign, we secured Written Declaration 40 in 2007, instructing the Commission to use the next EU Directive on animal experiments to end the use of apes and wild caught monkeys in experiments and set a timetable to phase out primate research. Over 400 MEPs signed (55% of the European Parliament). Pro-vivisection lobbyists flooded the meetings discussing the new Directive, opposing any measures that might restrict animal experimentation. For over three years we fought our most intense campaign in history.

As a result the Directive adopted in 2010 included certain restrictions on monkey experiments: an end to experiments on chimpanzees (although a caveat allows this to be overturned on a specific case appeal, but this has not been activated); no more wild caught monkeys; phase out of monkeys born of wild caught parents; retrospective review of experiments; greater transparency; thematic review of specific research. Sadly, the timetable to phase out primate experiments was lost but the evidence against the use of primates has continued to mount.

There have followed six intense years working to push for the best of the Directive to be implemented across Europe – with some countries, including our own, delaying and prevaricating on some issues.

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Last year, NAVS and ADI were pleased to see prominent naturalists, biologists, veterinarians and animal behaviourists including Dr Jane Goodall, broadcaster Sir David Attenborough, Prof. Ned Buyukmihci and Prof. Marc Bekoff, call for action on the use of primates in neuroscience experiments.

Now with the EU Directive on animal experiments under review again, with a consultation on the use of primates taking place, **WE NEED YOUR HELP** to push again for the timetable demanded by the European Parliament a decade ago.

**Advanced Replacements**

A 2006 European Commission Survey found 80% of respondents felt primates experiments to be “not acceptable”. Written Declaration 40/2007 sought a commitment to replace these experiments with advanced techniques such as computer modelling, analytics and databases, tissue or cell cultures and AMS with micro-dosing.

Some catastrophic drug trials have shown the unreliability of using primate results to predict human effects, and safe human dosing studies such as micro-dosing combined with analytical tools such as Accelerator Mass Spectrometry, provide safer and more reliable human based data.

Monkey and dog tests have become locked into the regulatory process – the ‘tick box’ approach to safety testing. The NAVS has previously revealed leaked lab documents showing human trials underway whilst animal tests were still being conducted. There appears to be no logic in choosing to extrapolate from animals when human data is available, other than to simply tick off tests as quickly as possible.

Ten years ago, the World Health Organization predicted a surge in mental and neurological illnesses over the next 20 years. In the face of government support for neuroscience experiments on primates, the Lord Dowding Fund (LDF, our non-animal research wing), funded a series of projects at Aston University and elsewhere, including a new imaging facility at Aston where human patients and volunteers could undergo non-invasive brain scans. Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) is important in non-invasive brain imaging technologies using human volunteers would replace the use of primates.

**Horror monkey experiments in UK & China**

At University of Newcastle, monkeys had electrodes inserted into their brains and spine. A chemical was injected into their brains to paralyse hand movements and the spine was electrically stimulated with to see the effect on arm and hand muscles. To add to their terror and torment, the ability to reach and grasp was assessed in food restricted animals by putting pieces of fruit in front of their paralysed limbs.

At Oxford University, researchers carried out the same experiment on 25 macaque monkeys AND 25 humans to compare data. Whereas human participants voluntarily lay in an fMRI brain scanner, monkeys were fixed into a frame, positioned on their front and sent into the scanner under light anaesthesia. Aside from unnecessarily subjecting monkeys to stress which human volunteers do not endure, researchers found the brains of humans and monkeys differ in many ways.

Swiss researchers paralysed monkeys in China to avoid the “burden” of regulations in Europe or the USA. They gave monkeys paralysing spinal cord injuries and inserted brain implants to test a technology to make them walk again. Astonishingly, researchers stated that the approach used in primates “wouldn’t be practical” in human spinal cord injury. The researchers are already carrying out implantation studies in humans with spinal cord injuries.

**Devastating human consequences**

Last month, a BBC docu-drama revisited the catastrophic 2006 trial of drug TGN1412. A group of healthy volunteers were given the drug in doses 500 times weaker than it had been given to laboratory monkeys. It had also been tested extensively in dogs and rabbits with no adverse effects. Within an hour the volunteers were transferred to intensive care with side effects including soaring body temperatures, dilated blood vessels; plasma leaking into surrounding tissue
and dramatically falling blood pressure. One man’s head and neck swelled massively and his limbs turned purple, one had fingers and toes amputated. The sheer terror expressed by the volunteers, not knowing what was happening, was a reminder of what lab animals endure on a daily basis.

This led to reform of how drug trials on humans are performed. But the start point of the tragedy – the misleading animal data – was left unchanged. In the media, we called for an overhaul of out of date animal testing methods. The road leading to the TGN1412 disaster remains the same.

Last year, a trial on BIA 10-2474 by French company Biotrial saw six volunteers hospitalised displaying neurological symptoms, one lost all his fingers and toes and one died. An investigation confirmed that high doses had been administered over long periods to monkeys, dogs, mice and rats with no comparable effects. Doses in some monkeys are estimated at around 75 times higher without causing neurological toxicity like that in humans.

**Ending monkey experiments**

As a member of Eurogroup for Animals, we are working to shape the next European Directive on animal experiments and maximise protection in all the EU countries. In the UK, we are pushing for assurances that the protections for animals for which we fought so hard in Europe, are all enshrined in UK law.

Our team meets regularly with the UK Home Office, presenting scientific evidence, challenging decisions and policies and responding to scientific consultations as every aspect of the 2010 EU Directive is implemented. At this stage, there are indications that a logical approach would be for EU regulations on animal experiments to remain in place, post Brexit. What is less clear, are the aspects of the Directive that have not yet been implemented – revoking the notorious secrecy clause, Section 24 of the Act, has been repeatedly delayed.

In terms of primate experiments, pressure needs to be put on in both the UK and the European Union, as both will impact what happens in the UK.

**Now you can have your say**

The European scientific committee, SCHEER, has published its preliminary opinion on primates in research. We are submitting our response with detailed information on replacing primates with non-animal methods.

You can take part, too! We are issuing a “virtual postcard” outlining the main concerns with SCHEER’s opinion, which the European Commission will use to inform their update of European laws on animal experiments. You can send this to make the following points:

- **A timetable** for phasing out primate experiments is essential to drive the implementation of replacement and provide a route to end their use.
- **Replacement must mean replacement!** The use of other animal species, such as mice and pigs, over primates, is misrepresentation of the definition of ‘replacement’.
- **Unsubstantiated claims** about the necessity for primate experiments. Mentioning casual “similarities” between humans and other primates is NOT scientific evidence that primate species are indispensable in research.

**EU Action:** Respond to the European Scientific Committee preliminary opinion on primates in research, call 020 7630 3340 or visit our website www.navs.org.uk for our virtual postcard.

**UK Action:** Write to your MP and ask that they secure the government’s commitment to transfer all EU laboratory animal protection regulations into UK law, as the UK leaves the EU. Ask them to support establishment of a timetable to phase out the use of primates in experiments.

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**Vivisection in Britain in numbers**

4,142,631 experiments on animals

3,405 dogs 2,234 monkeys 3,034,849 mice 265,738 rats 192 cats 12,272 rabbits

2,800,000 Genetic Modification Procedures

67% of all experiments

Source: Home Office Statistics for 2015
A huge amount of animal protection legislation, amassed over 40 years, is the result of EU Directives. We are working to ensure that none of this is swept away as a result of Brexit.

In March, with a coalition of animal groups (ADI, APA, Cats Protection, CIWF, OneKind, The Donkey Sanctuary, RSPCA, USPCA, WAP, WHW) we presented a ten point plan at the House of Lords to ensure animal protection is not lost in the Brexit negotiations. Speakers included Baroness Parminter, Sir Roger Gale MP, Hilary Benn MP. The UK has still not fully implemented the last EU Directive on animal experiments and animal experimenters are likely to see a chance to remove what they claim is "red tape" but in real terms represents what little restrictions and scrutiny there is on animal research. Areas such as "retrospective review" of experiments demanded by the EU Directive are likely to be challenged over time, if not straight away. There are further complexities within the EU Cosmetics Directive. Whilst UK resuming cosmetics testing on animals appears unlikely, having ended such testing ahead of Europe as a result of our campaign, what of the ban on the import into the EU of cosmetics tested on animals? This put pressure on the rest of the world to follow suit if they want to sell cosmetics in Europe. But will the UK stand firm when negotiating its own trade deals with the USA and China?

EU Directive on animal experiments under review

The European Commission is now reviewing Directive 2010/63 which governs animal research. We have taken part in a series of consultations on how non-animal alternatives are implemented under the Directive, and how animals could be replaced in education and research. We highlighted how not enough is being done to implement replacements, due to complacency in the animal research industry and lack of wider engagement with those like ourselves seeking to drive replacement forward.

During the passage of Directive 2010/63 we secured an amendment to include ‘thematic review’, a legal mechanism to challenge and replace animal experiments. We have outlined to the Commission how thematic review can be advanced to implement non-animal methods, save animals and be more clearly realised in the next Directive.

Progress in China

Data from a non-animal test method can now be used for testing ingredients for cosmetics. Once implemented in China, the test will stop animals being used when determining a chemical’s potential to harm people after exposure to light. This is a great step in an international shift away from tests on animals.

Eye burning in dogs

In a US laboratory, dogs were subjected to weeks of painful chemical burns to their eyes which caused ulceration. They were then killed and corneas removed for dissection and examination of scars. This cruel experiment had already been carried out in numerous other species.

Organoid to replace animals

Organoids are 3D cell clusters that organise themselves to exhibit similar function as the tissue of an organ. They can be used to test drugs and model disease. Brain organoids model the human brain more accurately and could be used to replace animals in neurological studies.

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