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Council adopts its position on stricter rules for animal experimentation

The Council today¹ adopted its first-reading position on a draft directive for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, aimed at strengthening the protection of animals whilst allowing research to continue playing a key role in the fight against diseases ([6106/10](#) + [6106/10 ADD 1](#) + [9968/10 ADD 1](#)).²

The principle of the Three Rs (replacement, reduction and refinement)³ will be explicitly spelled out and firmly anchored throughout the provisions of the new directive. In addition, the concept of refinement covers not only the choice of method but also embraces other areas such as the care of animals.

The new directive, which will replace directive 86/609 will cover vertebrate animals, including independently feeding larval forms and foetal forms of mammals as from the last third of their normal development, and cephalopods (for instance squids).

¹ The decision was taken, without debate, at a meeting of the Council in charge of Justice and Home Affairs.

² The German delegation abstained.

³ **Replacement** refers to the preferred use of non-animal methods over animal methods whenever it is possible to achieve the same scientific aim; **reduction** refers to methods that enable researchers to obtain comparable levels of information from fewer animals, or to obtain more information from the same number of animals; **refinement** refers to methods that alleviate or minimize potential pain, suffering or distress, and enhance animal welfare for the animals still used.

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Experiments using animals will require a systematic, compulsory prior evaluation. Member states will also have to ensure that all breeders, suppliers and users are authorised and registered with the competent authority.

The keeping and use of non-human primates for scientific purposes will be subject to tight restrictions. Experiments with great apes such as chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans will be prohibited; a member state may however allow exceptionally the use of great apes if it has justifiable reasons for believing that it is essential for the survival of the species itself or because of an unexpected outbreak of a life-threatening or debilitating disease in human beings.

As a general rule, animals taken from the wild will not be allowed to be used in experiments, with some exceptions. The directive will also progressively require that non-human primates may only be used if they are the offspring of animals which have been bred in captivity or if they are sourced from self-sustaining colonies.

Approval of the draft directive is a step towards the ultimate goal of achieving the full replacement of experiments on live animals as soon as it is scientifically possible to do so. According to experts, however, the current scientific knowledge does not allow a complete phase-out of animal experimentation. Around 12 million animals are used each year in scientific experiments in the EU.

The Council's position reflects a provisional agreement reached with the European Parliament and will now be forwarded to the European Parliament which is due to adopt the directive in its second reading.