Animal experiments in Great Britain, 2017

Friday 20 July, 2018

Every single day of the year, over 10,000 sentient animals are being subjected to horrific experiments including being poisoned and killed.

3, 721,744 million animals were used in scientific procedures in Great Britain in 2017, as reported by the Home Office. This represents a decrease of 3.8%, however, the reliability of the annual statistics is under intense scrutiny by animal welfare groups because information is protected under section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

In 2014, the government held a public consultation to review section 24 and no findings have been published to date.

A change in policy and an end to the secrecy surrounding animal tests is urgently needed to enable science to save lives, which would be better for people and animals.

On the 12th July 2018, the government released its Brexit White Paper, and this could have implications for the existing legislation that protects animals. It is anticipated that the UK will transpose European legislation as part of Brexit.

This could be an important moment in terms of strengthening existing laws for animals in the UK, as well as speeding up the process that currently slows down alternative methods being accepted, if the UK government decides to implement a domestic regime for regulating chemicals, so it is important that the case to repeal section 24 continues in order to protect animals.

While the government statistics reveal some information about animal experiments, such as the numbers of each species used, whether the animals were born in the UK or elsewhere, and ranks their suffering from ‘mild’ to ‘severe’, little is known about what life is actually like for each of those animals that live and die in laboratories.

Naturewatch Foundation Campaign Manager, Paul Smith, explains:

“The Government Statistics supply the basic numbers about animal experiments in Great Britain, but we know very little about what life is like for these sentient animals. The truth about their accommodation, how they are fed, exercised, trained, tested and killed is hidden from the public and has been for many years. We also know nothing about the exact nature of each experimental procedure. As a nation of animal lovers, the British public is not able to access this information because it is illegal to disclose it thanks to the Secrecy Clause. It is important to press forward because it might get abandoned due to Brexit which would be a travesty”.

Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 – the so-called ‘Secrecy Clause’ - makes it an offence punishable by up to two years’ imprisonment to disclose certain details about the use of animals for scientific procedures, even if the researchers carrying out the procedures want it to be known.

Scientific bodies, animal welfare groups, and representatives of both major political parties have acknowledged the need to repeal the clause, but the Government is yet to take action.

450 procedures involved the testing of household product ingredients last year, but because of section 24, we cannot know what products those ingredients might go into or what methods were used to test on them.

The 3.72 million animals used in scientific procedures last year included 2,496 dogs, 71 cats, 288 equines, and 2215 primates. The vast majority continue to be mice, zebrafish and rats.

Naturewatch Foundation is calling on the new Minister of State with responsibility for animal experiments, Baroness Williams of Trafford to urgently begin the process of repealing section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act so the British public can finally be truly informed about animal experiments.

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More Information

The Home Office released the National Statistics publication 'Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain, 2017' on July 19 2018. This publication provides details of scientific procedures performed using live animals during the year 2017.

- There were 3.79 million procedures using animals in 2017.
- Around 3.72 million live animals were used in those procedures.
- 81% of the procedures were rated as painful to some degree. Of those, 95 thousand inflicted severe pain including 15 dogs and 13 primates
- 450 procedures involved the testing of household product ingredients.

Read Naturewatch Foundation's report on the many delays and failures to repeal the Secrecy Clause:

https://naturewatch.org/files/uploads/Transparency_and_Animal_Experiments15.06.18.pdf

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About Naturewatch Foundation

Naturewatch Foundation is a registered charity that has been speaking out on behalf of animals for over 25 years by:

- Campaigning peacefully against animal abuse
- Lobbying to improve animal protection legislation
- Raising awareness through education
- Supporting the World Animal Day movement to raise the status of animals around the globe

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