

Revision of Council of Europe Convention ETS 123 Guidelines for the Accommodation and Care of Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes

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Summary — Within the 43 Member States of the Council of Europe, Appendix A of *Convention ETS 123* provides guidance on the standards of accommodation and care to be provided for animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes. At a meeting of the Parties to the Convention in 1997, a resolution providing additional guidance on accommodation and care was adopted. At the same meeting, it was agreed that, as scientific knowledge and experience had progressed since adoption of *ETS 123* in 1986, a Working Party should be convened to consider the revision of Appendix A. The Working Party first met in January 1999, and since then, there have been a number of Working Party meetings, and a number of meetings of Expert Groups, who are tasked with producing guidelines incorporating species-specific needs. The Expert Groups have drafted proposals for the accommodation and care of rodents, rabbits, dogs, cats, ferrets, farm animals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish. These proposals will complement the general principles of accommodation and care included in the general section of Appendix A. This comprehensive review has provided an opportunity to incorporate new ideas on housing and care based on scientific data and on best contemporary practises. It is expected that these revisions will be used throughout the scientific community to inform accommodation and care practises for animals used for scientific purposes.

Key words: accommodation, care, Convention, Europe.

Introduction

The Council of Europe was established in 1949, with ten Member States. It is an intergovernmental organisation that aims to protect human rights, to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity, to seek solutions to problems facing European society (for example environmental protection and human cloning), and to promote democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform. There are now 43 Member States. The 15 European Union states are all members of the Council of Europe.

In 1986, a European Convention for the protection of vertebrate animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes (1) was opened for signature, and this entered into force in 1991. Nineteen Member States are signatories to this Convention, and 14 of them have ratified the Convention.

The provisions of this Convention cover areas such as care and accommodation, conduct of experiments, humane killing, authorisation procedures, control of breeding or supplying and user establishments, education and training, and statistical information. The Convention includes two technical Appendices presenting guidelines for accommodation and care of animals (Appendix A) and tables for the presentation of statistical data on the use of animals for scientific purposes (Appendix B).

The Convention provides for Multilateral Consultations of the Parties at least every 5 years, to examine the application of the Convention and the advisability of revising it or extending any of its provisions according to changed circumstances and new scientific evidence. The Multilateral Consultations are prepared by a working party.

Multilateral Consultations were held in 1992, 1993 and 1997. At the 1997 Multilateral Consultation, a resolution on the accommodation and care of animals was adopted, which contained supplementary guidance, based on developments in housing and care practises since the Convention was introduced in 1986. At the same meeting, it was agreed that, as scientific knowledge and experience had progressed since adoption of *ETS 123* in 1986, a Working Party should be convened to consider the revision of Appendix A.

Appendix A of Convention ETS 123

Appendix A offers guidelines to Member States on the interpretation of Articles of the Convention (1), in particular, Article 5, which states:

Any animal used or intended for use in a procedure shall be provided with accommodation, an environment, at least a minimum degree of freedom of movement, food, water and care, appropriate to its health and well-being. Any restriction on the extent

to which an animal can satisfy its physiological and ethological needs shall be limited as far as practicable. In the implementation of this provision, regard should be paid to the guidelines for accommodation and care of animals set out in Appendix A to this Convention.

The Appendix includes guidance on the function, general design and construction of animal facilities, on the provision of an appropriate environment, including temperature, ventilation, humidity, lighting and noise, and on specific animal care provisions, such as feeding, watering, bedding, enclosure dimensions and space allowances, and humane killing.

Revision of Appendix A

In 1993, the German Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry, with the financial support of Directorate-General XI of the European Commission, organised a workshop to review critically the recommendations given in Appendix A of *ETS 123*. This workshop was attended by a number of experts in housing and care of the common laboratory species. The report of the meeting (2) identified a number of areas where it was felt that some additional guidance was needed in Appendix A to reflect recent research findings and expert opinions on husbandry and care practises. For example, it was considered that the importance of social housing and the benefits of a complex environment should be highlighted.

Dr O'Donoghue, editor of the proceedings, submitted a summary of the recommendations to the Council of Europe in 1996. These formed the basis for discussions at the Multilateral Consultation in 1997, which resulted in the adoption of a Resolution on the accommodation and care of laboratory animals (3). This resolution provided recommendations for various species groups, giving greater detail on species specific needs than was contained in Appendix A, and identified areas where research was needed to determine the optimal housing conditions for laboratory animals.

The Multilateral Consultation highlighted the need for a review of Appendix A to incorporate additional guidance and updated practises on the husbandry and care of laboratory animals.

The revision of Appendix A began in 1998, and is ongoing. Organisations that attend the Meetings of the Parties were invited to nominate experts to contribute to discussions on the revision of Appendix A.

The first meeting of the Working Party was held in Strasbourg in January 1999. Representatives from the Member States were invited, together with representatives from organisations involved with the care and use of animals in scientific procedures. Organisations represented at these discussions

included the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC), European Biomedical Research Association (EBRA), European Federation of Animal Technologists (EFAT), European Federation for Primatology (EFP), European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA), European Science Foundation (ESF), Federation of Laboratory Animal Breeders Associations (FELABA), Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations (FELASA), Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), International Council for Laboratory Animal Science (ICLAS), Institute for Laboratory Animal Research (ILAR), International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE), World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and Eurogroup for Animal Welfare (EUROGROUP).

Small Expert Groups were convened to prepare proposals for the common laboratory species to supplement the guidance contained in the general section of Appendix A. Initially, additional guidance from the experts was requested on rodents, rabbits, dogs, cats and non-human primates. Subsequently, the Working Party agreed that guidance on additional species should be included, and additional expert groups were established to produce proposals for the commonly used farm species, mini-pigs, birds, reptiles, amphibia and fish.

The proposals from the Expert Groups have been submitted in two parts, a Part A, which gives the proposals for inclusion in Appendix A, and a Part B, which provides background material and justification for any proposed changes to existing text. The initial remit from the Working Party to the Expert Groups was that changes should only be proposed where there is scientific evidence that welfare will be enhanced, and that due consideration should be given to any impact such changes may have on scientific objectives. Perhaps not unexpectedly, it has proved difficult in some circumstances to produce compelling scientific evidence for change, simply because many basic behavioural studies have not been done. In such circumstances, it has been accepted that the recommendations could be made based on the practical experiences of the experts having consideration of current practises.

There have been four Working Party meetings to date, with further meetings planned. Good progress has been made, and there is general agreement within the Working Party on the proposals for the general section and for the species-specific sections for rodents, rabbits, dogs and cats.

The revised general section will acknowledge that, although there are often highly conflicting interests between the scientific requirements and the needs of the animals, the basic physiological and ethological needs of the animals (freedom of movement, social contact, meaningful activity, nutrition, water) should be restricted only for the minimum

necessary period of time and degree. The importance of good communication between scientists and animal care staff will be emphasised to ensure that any compromise to animal welfare is minimised to a level consistent with the scientific objectives of the study.

In terms of housing and enrichment, important principles that have been agreed upon are that animals should be socially housed wherever possible and that they should be provided with an adequately complex environment to allow expression of a wide behavioural repertoire. This has resulted in some significant changes to the existing guidelines for enclosure dimensions and space allowances. The proposed new dimensions should provide an improved environment for the animals and eliminate the welfare problems associated with some of the existing standards, for example, skeletal damage in rabbits (4, 5).

Discussions within the Working Party continue on the proposals from the Expert Groups on ferrets, non-human primates, farm animals, mini-pigs, birds, amphibia, reptiles and fish.

It is not possible at this stage to provide a firm timetable for the adoption of a revised Appendix A. In addition to the ongoing discussions on the detailed species proposals at the Working Party meetings, there are a number of procedural difficulties that have to be addressed before a Multilateral Consultation of the Member Parties can take place at which a revised Appendix A can be adopted. For example, in June 1998, a *Protocol of Amendment (ETS 170)*, providing for a simplified procedure for the amendment to the technical appendices to the Convention, was opened for signature. A number of Parties have yet to agree to this Protocol. Officials in the Council of Europe and in the European Union are striving to advance these issues, but no firm

date can be given on when these issues may be resolved.

Conclusion

The comprehensive review of Appendix A has provided an opportunity to incorporate new ideas on housing and care based on scientific data and on best contemporary practises. It is expected that these revisions will be used throughout the scientific community to inform accommodation and care practises for animals used for scientific purposes. It is a source of frustration to all those involved in the discussions that there is, as yet, no indication of when this process may be finalised.

References

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