

## Westminster Hall debate relating to laboratory animals and the Animal Welfare Act – e-petition 591775

7<sup>th</sup> February 2022

### About FRAME

FRAME was founded in 1969 to champion human-centred scientific research and to work towards a better world for researchers, animals, and the wider population.

FRAME's vision is a world where non-animal methods are considered scientific best practice and we no longer need to use animals in scientific procedures. We support the timely development and implementation of scientifically valid methods which will provide reliable data and replace the need for animal experiments in medical and scientific research, education and testing. We accept that a total end to the use of animals in science cannot be achieved immediately, however the current scale of animal experimentation is unacceptable.

### 'Change the law to include laboratory animals in the Animal Welfare Act'

#### What would including laboratory animals in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (AWA) change?

Including laboratory animals under the [Animal Welfare Act](#) would afford them full protection from pain, suffering and distress. This is in line with the 5 needs outlined in the act:

1. The need for a suitable environment
2. The need for a suitable diet
3. The need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
4. The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
5. The need to be protected from pain, injury suffering and disease

This would be a huge step for the welfare of these animals. This step would essentially bring an end to animal use in research, as the definition of a regulated procedure under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA) is any procedure applied to a protected animal that may have the effect of causing a level of pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm equivalent or higher than that caused by the introduction of a needle. This would also make ASPA obsolete as a piece of legislation as by definition all regulated procedures therefore have the potential to cause some level of pain or suffering.

#### What are the challenges with this?

At 10,000 signatures, the government responded to the e-petition. They stated that "the use of animals in scientific research remains a vital tool in improving understanding of how biological systems work in both health and disease. Such a use is crucial for the development of new medicines

and cutting edge medical technologies for both humans and animals.” They concluded their response by stating that there would be no plans to amend the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Whilst a legislative change such as this would strengthen protection for laboratory animals and help achieve our ultimate goal of ending animal use in research, it is unlikely that the government’s stance on this has changed in the last six months, and even more unlikely that the government will accept an immediate end to animal use in research rather than a gradual phase-out.

Furthermore, during the debate held on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021 relating to the banning of, and phasing out of animal experiments, George Freeman stated during his conclusions that he does not believe we are at the point where we can completely move away from reliance on animals. Moving away from animals would be inevitable if laboratory animals were included under AWA unless changes were made the Animal Welfare Act to limit the scope of the legislation regarding laboratory animals to allow regulated procedures to continue. If this were the case, we would question why the inclusion was imposed, and what the effect on ASPA would be.

Some areas of research do not yet have viable non-animal methods, or the methods are not widely available. Further funding and development into non-animal methods needs to be prioritised to ensure scientific research is not halted when animal use is ended. If the inclusion of laboratory animals in the AWA was a deadline or a goal to reach, this could set a timeline in which new approach methodologies that do not use animal models (NAMs) should be developed and funded, with more direct funding. This seems the most sensible approach and would support the government’s 2014 ‘Working to reduce the use of animals in scientific research’ plan.

Currently, ASPA covers any living vertebrate other than man and any living cephalopod, as well as any vertebrate in its foetal, larval or embryonic form in the last two-thirds of their development. This is recognition of species currently considered sentient. Currently the AWA only covers vertebrates. If laboratory animals were to be covered under ASPA, the extent of the AWA would need to be broadened to continue protection for sentient invertebrates. This would be a positive step forward within this legislation regardless, especially with the recent findings from the London School of Economics (LSE) that decapod crustaceans and cephalopod molluscs are sentient and able to experience pain, suffering and distress. Alternatively, to avoid changing the definition of animal under the AWA, invertebrates may be left out of the laboratory animal inclusion which would be taking a huge step back in terms of invertebrate sentience. This would need clarification.

### What could be done next?

The UK is at the forefront of scientific innovation, evidenced by the fast development and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine, and continually aims for higher standards of animal welfare on all fronts. This stance can only be taken further by the UK taking the long-overdue step of ensuring the development and uptake of NAMs are the focus of conversations surrounding - the use of animals in research and testing.

Publishing an updated plan to replace the 2014 delivery plan is an important step. This would provide an opportunity to set laboratory animal inclusion into the AWA as a goal, alongside the development of non-animal methods, showing that the UK is committed to more human-relevant science, and higher standards of animal welfare for all animals including those currently used in scientific research. The inclusion of laboratory animals in the AWA would not only protect these animals from potential suffering caused through scientific procedures, but would also make it a

criminal offence to not meet the freedoms other domestic and wild animal are entitled to, such as having suitable diet and freedom to express normal behaviours.

Invertebrate sentience would also need to be considered prior to laboratory animal inclusion in the AWA, to ensure that species protected under ASPA remain protected. Invertebrate sentience should also be considered with regards to the Animal Sentience Bill. From the recent findings from the LSE, invertebrate species with evidence of sentience should be afforded protection under the AWA act.

**To address the issues of reducing and replacing animal testing in parliament, there needs to be considered thought into the topics that are raised and debated. Broad topics, such as this debate, and the debate in October relating to animal testing, are often met with the same response from the government – ASPA is in place to protect animals used in research and ensure that the 3R's must be followed by law, and we fund projects relating to the 3Rs via the NC3Rs. When raising topics for debate, it needs to be considered whether they will elicit a worthwhile and clear response from the government that can shape the focus of future work and create a pathway for change. We also encourage MPs to consider what will bring real change in discussions around the issue of animal research. We have suggested some possible questions that could be raised in this particular debate on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February.**

If you would like to discuss this or other animal research policy related issue with FRAME please email [jessie@frame.org.uk](mailto:jessie@frame.org.uk)

## Questions

Will the government be publishing an updated plan on working to reduce the use of animals in scientific research to replace the 2014 plan?

Would the government consider the inclusion of animals used in science as a long-term goal in plans to reduce reliance on, and phase out, animals in research?

The government currently supports the National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs) through funding via UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). Does the government have a figure for how much of this funding is specifically channelled into 'replacement' and the development of non-animal methods?

In light of recent findings by the LSE and the Animal Sentience Bill, will classes of invertebrates with evidence of the capacity to suffer be afforded protection under the Animal Welfare Act? This is already recognised under ASPA.