

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND
TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

The Anti-Vivisection Union (SA) Inc. understands that this inquiry is primarily, or at least very particularly, concerned with the setting up of a national register relating to the animals used in scientific research, and at the outset we wish to express our strong support for such a project.

No doubt objections will be raised to setting up such a register by the institutions that use animals in experiments. The AVU has had some difficulty in the past extracting information in regard to the yearly statistics that are supposed to be kept in South Australia, both as to the numbers used in experiments and the areas in which they are used, which usually lag some years behind the current year. However, we understand that the figures kept here are in better shape than in most other States.

It seems to us that with all the current technological aids to the keeping of such statistics, and with the careful maintaining of records of every experiment undertaken, there should be no real difficulty today in recording these figures. Surely many businesses would have to keep records of much more complexity than this. Why should it be so difficult to keep figures of each experiment; for instance what the experiment has been undertaken for, the numbers of animals used, results of the experiment and so on?

This would certainly be of great assistance in discovering whether there is, as we suspect, a great deal of duplication of experiments in all States and would help to considerably reduce expenditure on scientific research. Once the experiment had been carried out it could be placed on the register and the information could be exchanged between States, cutting out the need for further investigation into the particular area involved. Of course it might result in some loss of jobs but then this now happens in every area of employment.

As far as we have been able to discover, the concept of the three R's - reduction, refinement, replacement - has never been taken very seriously, and this is borne out by the rising figures pertaining to animal experiments, which in the last few years have apparently risen by some 87%. Serious consideration given to the three R's concept would surely have caused a marked decline in the use of animals, which is supposed to be what the concept is all about, but this is certainly not the situation today.

Animal Ethics Committees have obviously been of no use in pruning down the numbers of experiments undertaken and the fact that the committees carry out their activities in an atmosphere of almost total secrecy does not suggest any hope of achieving their aim, namely the protection of animals.

Whenever, as sometimes happens, the animal welfare member of such a committee speaks out to the press, there is a veritable explosion of information, decidedly unpleasant in nature, revealing an extraordinary lack of protection for animals, inasmuch as there appears to be absolutely no money available to increase the number of inspectors and inspections.

Inspectors have always been touted as playing a key role in the protection of animals but since they exist in such derisory numbers they can hardly be said to have played any part at all. If the matter of protecting animals in laboratories were to be taken as seriously as it should be, obviously there is a need to increase the number of inspectors by a big margin.

In regard to the increasing number of animal experiments we believe that behind the push for further experimentation lie huge pharmaceutical interests which apparently regard the results of animal experiments as being some sort of insurance policy in case of legal disputation arising from adverse drug reaction cases. In reality animal experiments prove very little, animals being so completely different from humans, but adverse reaction to drugs is cited as being the fourth largest killer in the world, so no doubt whatever protection can be gained by whatever means, would be of use in the event of legal proceedings. We are sure the moral significance of this will not be lost on the Committee of Inquiry.

We can only hope that the Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals in Scientific Experiments is rigorously applied, but in view of the secrecy surrounding animal experimentation it is impossible to know if this is really the case. It has to be taken on trust, and we would rather it were shown to be so. A national register would be a very good way to begin, and we would urge the Committee of Inquiry to seriously examine this timely and essential process.

We wish to thank the Committee of Inquiry for the opportunity of presenting this submission.

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