

## **2nd meeting of the European NC Network**

**Stockholm, 28 February 2019**

***On 28 February 2019 representatives of 12 National Committees for the Protection of Animals used for Scientific Purposes (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom and Sweden) met in Stockholm. This meeting was the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the network and focused on discussions of communication and collaboration to continue in the spirit of the kick-off meeting in Brussels, 12 April 2018, hosted by the Dutch National Committee.***

***The participants agreed on having at least one, but aiming for two meetings a year. The frequency of meetings depends on several factors such as the incidence of occasions arranged by the European Commission, progress in the chosen initiatives/projects within the group as well as the requirement to have well prepared meetings with attractive topics. The following countries offered to be future organisers - Italy (fall 2019), Germany (spring 2020), Hungary (fall 2020) and Poland (spring 2021).***

***To ensure that all NCs included in the network gets information, regardless of whether having the opportunity to participate every time, minutes from each meeting should be uploaded at CIRCABC and sent out by mail to all NCs in Europe. It is therefore important that NCs update the contact list on the European Commission website.***

***The participants also agreed on a name for the network – the European NC Network.***

### **Setting the scene**

In 2018 the Dutch National Committee (NCad) initiated an informal working/communication group of National Committees (NC) willing to exchange experience, opinions/advice, guidance documents and codes of practice on replacement and the transition toward non-animal research. Utilisation of each other's expertise could help establish best practices across Europe and avoid overlap or repetition of initiatives.

Ten NCs attended the kick-off meeting in April 2018, eight of these were also represented in today's meeting. The focus of the kick-off meeting was to get to know each other as well as to identify common interests and action points. The agenda focused mostly on presentations from each country.

### **Presentations by NCs**

As organiser of this second meeting within the network Sweden started with short presentations of *The Swedish organisation* - Håkan Henrikson, Chair of the Swedish NC, *Swedish NC's important topics 2019* - Mats Sjöquist, member of the Swedish NC and *Work of the Swedish 3Rs Center* - Emma Svensk, The Swedish 3Rs Center.

Each NC then held a short presentation based on its fact sheet, compiled, collected and disseminated before the meeting (fact sheets attached).

The fact sheet is divided into three parts:

1. Important topics/occurrences since the last meeting
2. Suggestions of topics for the next meeting
3. Organisation chart that specifies how the various relevant bodies are positioned in each country

Highlights from the presentations:

- The newly formed Norwegian NC was represented in the meeting. In Norway, unlike many other countries, fish make up more than 95% of the animals used in experiments. The fish are often used in development of vaccines to prevent disease in aquaculture and in the process of finding methods for delousing of salmon. Norway also has a 3Rs Center, Norecopa, which is independent from the Norwegian NC.
- John Landers, resigning chair of the UK NC reported shortly on questions arising both in UK and throughout Europe regarding how Brexit could influence the work of the NC in UK, in this network and within the 3Rs at large. Professor David Main is appointed as new chair of the UK NC starting from March 2019.
- Several countries brought up questions on defining “a project”, communication and education.

The chair of the Dutch NC, Herman Koëter also gave a presentation on *The Dutch programme on innovative non-animal research* (PPT attached). The Netherlands invites us all to an International TPI Conference on this subject, save the date 28-29 November 2019.

### **Update on initiatives**

An update on the initiatives (*in italics*) that came up at the Brussels meeting:

- *Criteria for the selection of experts for consultations and working groups (The Netherlands)*

The Netherlands has begun to look at the issue, but got stuck on the criteria. Germany has made two calls for experts and now have a stabile pool.

- *Code of Practice for killing of animals in stock (The Netherlands)*

The Netherlands have produced a new Advisory report on genetically modified animals, “Died or killed before use in breeding programmes or animal procedures’ Part.2 Quality criteria”. The guidance is available at CIRCABC and at their website [www.english.NCadiierproevenbeleid.nl](http://www.english.NCadiierproevenbeleid.nl).

- *Enrichment/housing and alternative killing methods for (zebra) fish (Luxembourg/The Netherlands)*

Together with Luxembourg, the Netherlands have started to work with this question concerning zebrafish. They would also like to cooperate with Norway due to their expertise in other fish species.

- *Cumulative suffering (The Netherlands/Germany)*

The Netherlands have decided to collect and compile comprehensive casuistic information. Germany has contributed by sending some publications to the Netherlands.

The chair of the Luxembourg NC, that could not participate at the meeting, has let us know that in addition to working with *Enrichment/housing and alternative killing methods for (zebra) fish* they are also willing to contribute with an expert to the initiative on *Cumulative suffering*.

## Group discussions

Reineke Hameleers, member of the Dutch NC, held a presentation on *The questionnaire and summary of the results* as introduction to the group discussions. The questionnaire was developed by the Polish and Dutch NCs and distributed to all European NCs in order to collect information on the organization and work of each NC. The Dutch NCs has complied the answers and produced a summary which was presented at the meeting (PPT and summary attached).

Currently 14 NCs have responded to the questionnaire. However, the compilation and summary shall be a living document and therefore additional answers can be sent to the Dutch NC when possible.

Summary of the discussions:

- *How to understand the similarities and differences between the implementation and work of National Committees in different Member States*
  - Organisation is regulated by National laws and politics, therefore hard to harmonise.
  - It is possible and important to harmonise how NCs look at specific questions e.g. severity.
  - Understanding each other's criteria for accepting and rejecting applications is important but will require more sharing of information.
  - Use conferences to build harmonisation, maybe two-day meetings would help.
- *How we can cooperate to ensure better and more efficient sharing of information*
- *How we can cooperate regarding ongoing and upcoming initiatives*

All groups discussed these two questions together since they are connected.

- Focus on two specific topics for the next meeting, one selected at the previous meeting and one suggested by the host.
- Create core teams to make consensus papers on specific topics, one country responsible for progress within each team. Progress should be reported at the next meeting of the European NC Network.
- In preparation of a meeting within the European NC Network each NC could make a list of what they have accomplished since the last meeting, with concrete examples, and then describe a few of them in the meeting. Each country could then use the minutes from the meeting as a measure to inform their government.
- Facilitate communication by keeping the network as stable as possible and by ensuring proper flow of information within each NC.
- The meeting expressed an interest in finding out how the European Commission monitor the efficiency, progress and quality in the work of the NCs.

## Identifying joint interests, next steps and future topics

### *Joint interests*

- Increase use of CIRCABC, try to have as much materials as possible available in English. It is possible to adjust your personal settings in CIRCABC to be notified when something new is uploaded in the interest groups that you are part of.
- Make sure to involve NCs in the network that have not been active recently when meeting them on other occasions. Potentially they could also be reached via the NCPs.

- Facilitate communication by agreeing on a common vocabulary for the network and definition of specific terms.
- In order to avoid duplication, wait for the results from the *EWG on the Creation, Breeding, Maintenance and Reporting of Genetically Altered Animals (GAA)* and the *Workshop to review and develop templates for Non-technical Project Summaries (NTS) and the result of retrospective assessment* organised by the European Commission.
- Define “what is a project” and “what is an experiment” in terms of project evaluations in accordance with Art.38 of the European Parliament and Council Directive 2010/63/EU.
- Help users to improve the quality of applications and NTS.
- Education and training.

#### *Next steps and future topics*

- Cooperate on foetal calf serum. It is used in many *in vitro* methods that replaces animals in experiments, but its production raises ethics issues (*The Netherlands suggests collaboration with Denmark*).
- Share list of questions for inventing the NCs impact on stakeholders (*The Netherlands*). *The Netherlands* have consulted their stakeholders regarding the impact of the NC’s work and output, during their first 5 years, through a questionnaire followed by interviews. The answers resulted in changes to their long-term plan.
- Suggestions of topics for the next meeting have been compiled from the fact sheets (list attached).
- Suggested topics that connect to Art.38 of the European Parliament and Council Directive 2010/63/EU will be compiled and distributed to all participants for rating, in order to choose one topic for the next meeting (*Sweden*).

#### **Action points**

- Write a request to the European Commission to increase the frequency of official meetings with the European NCs. Meetings within the European NC Network and meetings organised by the European Commission are both important but have different purposes (*The Netherlands*).
- Compose and send a letter to the European Commission regarding possible improvements of CIRCABC to increase its use (*The Netherlands*).
- Share sketch/video on *Improving the NTS in project applications* (*Germany*).

#### **For future meetings**

- Name agreed for the network – the European NC Network.
- The network aims to have at least one, if possible two meetings a year. The following countries offered to be future organisers, Italy (fall 2019), Germany (spring 2020), Hungary (fall 2020) and Poland (spring 2021).
- Upload minutes from each meeting on CIRCABC and send out by mail to all NCs in Europe.
- Update the contact list on the European Commission website.