

The Committee has now published its report. This outlines the various techniques used in genetic modification and current trends in the use of genetically modified (GM) animals in research, and presents a framework for decision-making in this “difficult ethical area”. This framework includes considerations of welfare and respect for the integrity of life. There are chapters on the costs — in terms of animal welfare — and benefits of the use of GM animals in research and considerations as to whether the use of GM animals raises any new issues in this regard. In the report, the Committee makes 24 recommendations to the Government. These cover various specific points, such as that licences may not be issued for trivial objectives such as the creation or duplication of favourite pets, for work that can be expected to produce animals that would suffer severe or lasting distress, for the production of chimeras between human and other animals, or for genetic modification of great apes. Other recommendations are more general, such as that, in the case of GM animals, particular care be taken to consider all welfare costs when a project licence for production of foundation stock is considered, and that the Home Office should ensure that the obligation to monitor the welfare consequences of research involving GM animals be included as a condition of all project licences relating to such work. Among the other recommendations made are that consideration be given to commissioning research into the assessment of welfare of transgenic animals and that scoresheets for assessing welfare should be developed for cage-side use.

This is a thorough and wide-ranging review of the welfare and ethical issues raised by the development of new technology for genetic modification of animals. The Government’s response to the Committee’s recommendations is awaited.

Animal Procedures Committee: Report on Biotechnology (July 2001) Produced by the Animal Procedures Committee. 54 pp. A4. Available at the APC website: <http://www.apc.gov.uk>

How effective is the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976?

In 2000, the International Zoo Veterinary Group was commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to comprehensively review the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. The review was commissioned to determine the effectiveness of the Act, as currently administered, in achieving its aims. The report concludes that the Dangerous Wild Animal Act (DWAA) has been largely successful in protecting the public from dangerous wild animals that are privately owned. However, in order to improve the credibility of the Act and to encourage compliance with it, the report recommends several changes to the Act, to the 1984 Schedule and to the guidance given to local authorities. These include the following amendments.

The list of species covered by the legislation is generally considered to be out of date. Some of the listed species are not currently perceived to be dangerous by many animal keepers; in addition, changes to taxonomic classification have occurred since the Schedule was updated in 1984, and these must be updated to avoid legal dispute.

Inspection and licensing fees vary enormously from area to area. The report concludes that local authorities should be given guidance with regard to fees that can be lawfully charged for a licence. In addition, no central record of DWAA licences in the UK exists. This means that it is difficult for the government to monitor the way in which the DWAA legislation is being enforced. It is recommended that local authorities make annual returns to the government on the types and numbers of dangerous wild animals that are licensed; this would allow monitoring of trends in the types and numbers of dangerous wild animals held privately in the UK.

At present, it is illegal to enter a person’s home to investigate allegations of an offence under the Act if the alleged keeper has not applied for a licence. A revision of the Act to provide a

power of entry for local authorities, by magistrate's warrant, on reasonable suspicion of an offence under the Act would allow the investigation of allegations of an offence under the Act. Under the DWAA, local authorities have power of entry and seizure if a person keeps a dangerous wild animal without the authority of a licence; they also have sole authority to dispose of or destroy animals that they have seized under the Act. There is a potential conflict between the DWAA and the Human Rights Act 1998 over these powers of disposal and destruction, since the owner has no right to appeal against the judgement. The report suggests that this provision be reviewed in order to ensure that it is compatible with the Human Rights Act.

According to the report, penalties from magistrates do not provide an effective deterrent against offences under the Act. Therefore, the report suggests that DEFRA should make sure that the courts are aware of the seriousness of an offence under the Act and discuss the level of fines with the Magistrate's Association.

Pet shops are presently exempt from the Act, allowing unrestricted movement of dangerous wild animals from the premises. A suggestion has been made to either cancel the exemption for pet shops or amend the Pet Animals Act 1951 to control the sale of dangerous wild animals. This would ensure that such animals could not be sold to unlicensed owners. Furthermore, commercial farmers that farm wild boar, ostriches and emus are regulated under the DWAA. The report makes a recommendation to remove farmed wild boar, ostriches and emus from the schedule to relieve the pressure on commercial farmers and to retain the Act for its intended purpose of regulating the private keeping of dangerous wild animals.

At the end of the report, the authors indicate that they believe that the weaknesses in the DWAA can be rectified by appropriate alteration of the Act, the Schedule and the guidance given to local authorities as summarised above. They also state that the general welfare of exotic pet species would benefit from being given a higher profile.

Greenwood A G, Cusdin P A, Radford M (June 2001) Effectiveness Study of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. DEFRA Research Contract CR0246. Document available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/consult/dwaa/dwaastudy.pdf>

Welfare implications for low-value and surplus farm animals

In recent years, farmers have experienced difficulties in the disposal of surplus, old and low-value livestock. In 1998, the expansion of 'Specified Risk Material controls' to include the spinal cord of sheep, in conjunction with the relative strength of the pound, reduced the commercial value of poor-quality animals. Also, the withdrawal of the 'Calf Processing Aid Scheme' in July 1999, which provided payments for surplus dairy calves, and a fall in the value of cull ewes, combined to cause a situation that posed a serious threat to the welfare of these animals.

In April 2001, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) passed their report entitled 'Advice to Ministers on Welfare Implications for Low Value and Surplus Animals' to UK agricultural Ministers. The report was intended to guide Ministers' considerations of future methods of disposal of low-value and surplus animals. In this document, FAWC makes several recommendations to alleviate some of the problems associated with the disposal of low-value stock. FAWC recommends that Ministers and the livestock industry should explore all possible avenues to assist in the development of effective market solutions for low-value livestock.

FAWC suggests that a fully integrated national scheme should be established for the collection and disposal of fallen casualty or emergency animals. This scheme should be capable of providing a disposal route for unwanted calves and cull ewes at times of depressed prices. Any such national scheme should be easily audited. A system such as this would allow farmers