



# Anti Vivisection WA (Inc)

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*"Working to end experiments on animals!"*

## ETHICS COMMITTEES WHO DO THEY PROTECT?

By Alexander Schifferegger

The animal experimentation issue is a complex one. We must know our facts in order to talk about the issue, defend our stance, or debate the validity of all that we are led to believe. Our opponents have done an extremely good job of protecting their interests. An example of their ingenuity is the establishment of Animal Experimentation Ethics Committees (AEEC).

Firstly, let me explain what an AEEC is. AEEC's are bodies put in place to approve or disapprove research with animals. It is their function to consider whether the research in question is necessary, that is, whether it is of scientific or educational value. Their other major function is to ensure that the research will be carried out with limited pain (what is limited pain, whose limits?) and distress to the animal.

Ethics committees are always touted as being fair and balanced. However, that fact that it is the responsibility of the research institution to establish an AEEC ensures an immediate bias. The reason that vivisectionists can boast that AEEC's are balanced and fair is because it is necessary for them to include an animal welfare representative and an independent person ("preferably" not an employee of the institution) in the committee. What they fail to tell us is that the number of researchers and persons related in some way to the institution are the majority. With AEEC's structured in this way they are nothing but a rubber stamp for the research put forth by the institution; and of course the grants that fund the research.

We must also remember that the majority of our community believe that animal experimentation is necessary for human health. This does not disclude animal welfare organizations, nor animal welfare representatives that sit on ethics committees. We therefore have a situation whereby any research that is presented as necessary will be approved.

After a closer look at AEEC's it becomes evident that they are set in place to protect research institutions and researchers from scrutiny - it gives them a defence and makes the general public believe that there is nothing to worry about.

A closer examination of AEEC's gives one plenty to concern themselves with. Why, for example do the number of animals used for experiments increase year after year. For the year 1990-91 the total number of animals reported by the Department of Agriculture Bureau of Animal Welfare as being used for experiments was 240,000, for 1991-92 the number increased to 460,000, and for 1992-93 it grew to an astounding 500,000. These figures give credence to the reported 75% approval rate of grants for animal experiments by AEEC's. If the concern of the AEEC's is the welfare of animals why are many experiments still

carried out without the use of an anaesthetic (we are informed that the figure is around 85%)?

The existence of AEEC's gives the impression that everything is above board and that nothing unnecessary or untoward could take place while such a body is overseeing experiments and their initial approval.

If the general public knew to question rather than to believe, they would ask:

- ❖ Why animal experiments, are kept out of sight, in fact, hidden?
- ❖ Why, even by lodging a Freedom of Information request are we denied access to details of experiments?
- ❖ Why members of AEEC's are bound by a code of silence?

This all goes to show that animal experimentation is a serious, lucrative and career enhancing business.

In 1990, a senior veterinary pathologist, Dr Russ Beckett who sat on the AEEC at Australia National University opposed an experiment. The experiment involved drilling a hole into the skull of a monkey, and then inserting a probe into the monkey's brain for a few hours a day for several months. Dr Beckett believed the experiment contravened standards of decency, professional conduct and animal welfare. He thought the experiment to be archaic and that non-invasive methods could easily have replaced the suggested methods. He maintained that the insertion of the probe would result in chronic brain inflammation that would lead to altered brain states and altered conscious states that would negate the whole purpose. Dr Beckett was not invited back on the ethics committee after his term expired; the experiment went ahead.

Our battle is enormous because the problem is manifold: our community is convinced that animal experimentation is necessary for human health and anyone that believes otherwise is branded anti-science; vivisectors have created bodies in the guise of caring, ethical entities that give them a defence; vivisectors have managed to keep animal experimentation out of sight - out of sight, out of mind.

Believing that vivisectors care for animals is like believing a rapist cares for his victim: "The only thing I care about is whether the monkeys will turn out a property that I can publish. I don't have any love for them. Never have. I really don't like animals. I despise cats. I hate dogs. How can you like monkeys?" (Dr Harry F. Harlow)<sup>1</sup>

***Vivisection is inherently unjust; it is for this reason that we will see its total abolition.***

*Reference: 1. Hans Ruesch "Slaughter of the Innocent", 1983, p.52.*

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