

Perspective of the German Animal Welfare Federation

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In the early 1980s, in Germany, after a lot of discussions about the pros and cons of animal experimentation there was agreement between industry and the animal welfare movement that a focal point is needed, in particular on national, governmental level, to promote the development and the application of alternative methods. Together with remarkable support from the German government this agreement has been transformed into an institution that since its foundation in 1989 has received a world-wide reputation and acknowledgement from all interest groups involved: ZEBET.

From the beginning, the animal welfare community was involved in the setting-up and functioning of ZEBET, and it still is. Since 1994, ZEBET has been supported by an advisory committee. That committee is comprised of experts from various stakeholders including industry, government, and animal welfare. Its task is to support the work of ZEBET by giving recommendations concerning various issues and problems. These include the development and acceptance of alternative methods but also a critical appraisal of regulatory demanded animal tests with a view to apply the 3Rs.

In the first years, ZEBET's role was to give alternatives an official voice and to help overcoming principle objections against alternatives. In the meantime alternatives are much better accepted. So how could ZEBET's role be expanded? At the 10th anniversary of ZEBET I claimed: "What is still needed is another type of co-operation: ZEBET's obligatory involvement in any decisions relevant to the field of animal experiments and alternatives. More than in the past ZEBET must be given the role of a co-ordinating point e.g. for other governmental institutions concerned with problems of consumer or environmental protection." Clearly, the need for such an expanded role of ZEBET is still present today.

In addition to that, from an animal welfare point of view ZEBET's tasks should therefore include particularly:

- foster cooperation regarding the acceptance of alternatives
- raise factually supported criticism of animal experiments in various scientific areas (such as abnormal toxicity testing; use of dogs as a second species)
- deliver facts and data for the discussion of animal experimentation on a societal/political level
- provide support for alternatives in the process of drafting legislation
- supply information and advice with regard to applications for animal experiments submitted to the licensing authorities. This should be obligatory, at least for contentious cases, and members of ethics committees should have the possibility to obtain expert statements from ZEBET
- act as a national partner of ECVAM