

E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Campaigns Consultant, Animal Concern, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ. Tel: 01389-841-639, Mobile: 07721-605521. Fax: 0870-7060327. Animal Concern incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which has been Campaigning for animals since 1876
E-MAIL: animals@jfrobins.force9.co.uk website: <http://www.animalconcern.org/>

The Lord Smith of Kelvin KT,
House of Lords,
Westminster,
London SW1A 0PW

Dear Lord Smith,

I write concerning the devolvement of further powers from Westminster to Holyrood. In particular I ask that governance of the welfare of animals used in scientific procedures be transferred to Scotland.

I was involved in the lobbying campaign which resulted in the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 being replaced by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. I believe this was the only animal welfare law which was not transferred to Scotland within the original devolution package.

Last year nearly 620,000 live animals were used in scientific procedures in laboratories in Scotland. I cannot tell you how many laboratories or where they are as this information is not published by the Home Office which oversees the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act throughout Britain. Where these laboratories are situated and details of the experiments carried out in them is surrounded by a wall of secrecy.

Although my priority is the welfare of animals used in laboratories there is another very good reason for devolving responsibility for these laboratories to the Scottish Government.

Some years ago I obtained information that a commercial laboratory, containing pigs which had been genetically modified to humanise their tissues in a bid to make their organs less likely to be rejected if transplanted into humans, was situated in a forest close to the Highland town of Alness. Genetically modified pigs from the Alness breeding unit were sold to Huntingdon Life Sciences for use in their work on xenotransplantation.

When you genetically modify animals in this way you make it easier for disease, perhaps new strains of disease for which we have no cure, to cross from animals to humans. Disease transfer could occur simply through laboratory workers being in close proximity to the genetically modified pigs. Once infected a laboratory cleaner or security guard could carry say a new strain of swine flu out into the community and infect many more people before symptoms emerge.

The Scottish Executive, the local Council, Health Board and police did not know of the existence of this facility in Alness. Details of the laboratory and the work being carried out there were known only to officials at the Home Office in London and their small number of Inspectors who cover the whole of Scotland. Had a worker become infected with a new disease local health workers would not have been aware of the dangerous risks posed by the work they were involved in.

I urge you to recommend that responsibility for the welfare of animals used in scientific procedures be included in the promised further devolution of power from Westminster to Holyrood.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Animal Concern