

LAY MEMBERS NEWSLETTER



Report on the 2003 RSPCA Lay Members Forum

The purpose of the Lay Member's Forums is to get people together to compare notes on their experiences of the ERP. Last years forum had the added aims of launching the new Lay Members Resource book and discussing some of the problems that lay members face in reviewing projects involving the use of genetically modified (GM) animals. The day consisted of a mixture of information and discussion and talks were given from a range of perspectives that were intended to be interactive and to contribute to developing the role of lay members within the ERP.

The resource book

The lay members resource book has grown out of previous lay members forums and comments made by others involved or interested in the work of ERPs, including some Certificate Holders. Dr. Maggy Jennings of the Societies Research Animals Department (RAD), who organised the meeting, together with Dr. Jane Smith, said that we should be justifiably proud of what our ERPs have already achieved and contributed to in improving animal welfare. Many requests for the resource book have been received from the UK and from further afield, including Sweden and the U.S.A, indicating that a good set-up in the UK may be taken up elsewhere.

Understanding the technology and terms

Vicky Robinson, head of the MRC Centre for Best Practice for Animals in Research (CBPAR) gave the first talk and CBPAR also contributed to the cost of the day. Her presentation included a helpful lay person's guide to understanding the technology and terms in project licence applications involving genetic modification. She also highlighted where animal welfare may be compromised during the processes of producing and using GM animals, such as during the collection of tissues biopsies for genotyping.

An inspectors view

Neil Watt from the Home Office Inspectorate, gave an excellent talk on the process of licensing projects involving genetic

manipulation. Dr Watts gave an explanation of the ASPA and the difference between personal and project licences, and outlined the application of the cost-benefit

assessment to such projects. Also, he defined several important terms, including what is a protected animal, and introduced the new home Office term of 'Genetically Altered' (GA),

which includes animals that are genetically modified, mutant or cloned. He went on to emphasise the importance of the role that ERP committees and lay members play; a point that was reaffirmed by all the speakers throughout the day.

An animal technicians perspective

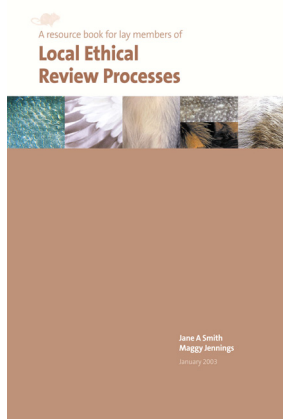
Jim Wallace of Science Associates eloquently explained how the rapid growth in the number of GM animals has posed new challenges for animal technicians in terms of housing, husbandry and avoiding infection. He stressed that new measures in training, human resources and material resources are needed to meet these challenges.

A scientists perspective

Nic Wells of Imperial College then gave an interesting and candid account of projects involving genetic modification from a scientists perspective. He spoke of the various pressures scientists are under, for example to obtain funding and to publish, and of what drives them in their work. He went on to explain why GM animals are used and various practical and welfare issues. Dr. Wells also highlighted the recently published report on refinement¹ and the ongoing working group on GM animal welfare assessments as examples of ways in which the 3Rs concept with respect to GM mice is being progressed.

A welfarists perspective

Robert Hubrecht, of the Universities Federation Animal Welfare (UFAW) and a



member of several ERP committees, gave a view of an animal welfare specialist. He highlighted that factors other than pain, such as sensory impairment, are important welfare issues that need to be factored into the cost-benefit (or harm-benefit) assessment. He also explained how difficult it can be for lay members to do their own assessment of 'harms', pointing out that lay summaries could often do with considerable improvement to help in this regard. Dr. Hubrecht also referred to another hot topic of the meeting; the importance of good communication between animal care staff and scientists and how this helps in reducing and refining experiments involving GM animals. The use of a 'mouse passport' system to keep track of phenotypes could be very useful to ensure that everyone is aware of the welfare problems and husbandry needs of each GM line.

Time to exchange experiences

Breakout sessions enabled lay members to discuss their experiences of the ERP generally

and issues related to genetic modification. Key points raised in the feedback were:

- The importance of good relationships between lay members, the NVS and NACWO.
 - The need for a good chairperson.
 - The importance of good lay summaries (only approximately half said they were satisfied with the lay summaries they received).
 - Better information as to *why* the GM animals are required needs to be included in the summary.
 - Visiting the animal unit at their establishment is a valuable experience, but many lay members were not sure how to approach this.
1. A BVAAWF/FRAME/UFAW/RSPCA Joint Working Group report, 'Refinement and reduction in production of genetically modified mice', edited by Vicky Robinson. Laboratory Animals Volume 37, Supplement 1.

NEW RESOURCES!

➤ **GM animals – available in July**

Aimed to help lay members evaluate projects involving genetic modification, this resource includes explanation of the processes, terms, and welfare issues associated with projects involving GM animals.

➤ **Coming soon...**

- Getting the most from a tour of the animal facility
- Individual species checklists (starting with birds)

2004 RSPCA Lay members Forum

Will be held in **Edinburgh** on **Thursday 30th September**

Including topics such as:

- Touring the facility
- What makes good scientific justification
- What the animal care staff are trying to do for both small and large animals and how the ERP can support them

To express an interest write to: **erp-laymembers@rspca.org.uk**