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Great apes suffer setback in EU animal testing vote

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STRASBOURG, France (Reuters) - Researchers can continue most experiments on mankind's closest relatives -- chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans -- after European Union lawmakers watered down proposals to restrict testing.

The EU's executive Commission last year proposed a range of measures to improve the welfare of the 12 million vertebrate animals used in experiments each year, mostly mice and rats.

The European Parliament backed plans for an upper limit on the level of pain animals should endure and to increase EU efforts to develop non-animal alternatives, with 540 votes in favor and 66 against.

Animal welfare groups said the watered-down proposals, which still need backing by the EU's 27 nations, amounted to business-as-usual for the industry.

The Commission had also proposed scaling back experiments on the 12,000 primates used each year, so they could only be used if the survival of their species was at stake or during an unexpected outbreak of life-threatening disease in humans.

The European Parliament said its members had rejected that part of the proposal as it would hinder research into some forms of cancer, multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's disease.

They also called for a feasibility study before agreeing to a ban on capturing wild primates to use in laboratories.

Drug industry group EFPIA said the parliament had managed to balance the protection of animals, the reality of biomedical research, and the needs of patients.

Half of the 12 million vertebrates used each year are for drug development, a third for biology studies and the rest for cosmetics and disease diagnosis.

Animal protection groups said the parliament had largely caved in to industry lobbying and researchers would be able to use primates for nearly any purpose they chose.

"The Parliament has produced a charter for the multibillion pound animal research industry to carry on business as usual, with scant regard either for animal welfare or public opinion," said Michelle Thew of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection.

One politician involved in drafting the laws took the unusual step of resigning her role in February, blaming excessive industry interference.

(Reporting by [Pete Harrison](#); Editing by Jon Hemming)



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