European Commission announces infringement procedure against restrictive Italian animal research law

The European Commission has announced the start of an infringement procedure against Italy, whose animal research law it calls ‘too restrictive’. The Commission has sent a letter of formal notice to the Italian government, as the first step in the infringement procedure. Earlier this year, EARA’s partner organisation Research4Life asked the European Commission on behalf of 37 public and private Italian research institutions for the law to be reassessed.

The infringement procedure concerns the overly stringent transposition of the European Directive for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. The Commission has informed Italy that its animal research law, legislative decree 26/2014, places ‘excessive restrictions’ on the use of animals for scientific purposes, thereby penalising Italian research.

Currently, the Italian law imposes limitations to animal research including bans on xenotransplantation and studying drugs of abuse. The breeding of cats, dogs and non-human primates is currently forbidden in Italy, as well as conducting mild experiments that do not require sedation or pain-killers. These restrictions pose serious problems for the state of biomedical research in Italy, and makes it impossible for Italian science to compete with the other European member states.

In order to resolve the infringement procedure, Italy must ensure that its laws abide by the requirements set out in the European Directive. The Italian government will consult with the Italian scientific community on its new law; Research4Life is expected to play a leading role in advising on the new transposition of EU Directive 2010/63. The Italian government has been given two months to respond to the infringement procedure.

Kirk Leech, Executive Director of the European Animal Research Association, said: “We can expect opponents of animal research, both inside and outside the Italian government, to campaign to keep the status quo. The Italian scientific community must hold its nerve and ensure that the new law adopts the best practices widely applied across the European Union.”