

Weighing ethical decisions against the benefits of research

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“The animal welfare/rights perspective”

- No such thing as “the” perspective.
- Very diverse viewpoints.
- Range of research is itself diverse and how these viewpoints interact is complex.

*"I weep for you," the Walrus said:
"I deeply sympathize."
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes...*



(extract from "The Walrus and the Carpenter", which appears in *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll).

What is involved in weighing ethical considerations against the benefit?

- Valuing the benefits of research is *part* of the ethical decision, not separate.
- Justification – threshold question. What are the expected benefits? What is the impact on animals – *all* impacts? How do these stack up?
- Other issues that influence justification:
 - Alternatives – availability and use (replacement)
 - Numbers of animals used (reduction)
 - Welfare once protocol underway (refinement).

Justification

- An evolving issue – what may have been considered justified in the past may not continue to be justified.
- Complex – sometimes for a protocol to be considered justified there needs to be a lot of faith placed in the outcome. Is this appropriate? How to keep track?
- Close relationship between justification and the availability of alternatives.

Alternatives

- Immense challenge in keeping up with development of alternatives – both awareness and the ability to make use of them.
- Alternatives may actually exist but only via other disciplines – how to approach this?
- Validation – can some protocols be part of the process of validating alternatives, so that some protocols are the last of their kind?

Numbers

- Important to get the balance right between reduction and scientific value.
- If the results end up being statistically questionable, then there can be no justification at the fundamental level.
- Also numbers in production can easily be overlooked.

Welfare

- Once decision to use animals is made, the obligation to minimise any suffering is paramount.
- Lots of species-specific detail to consider, this is an area that is constantly evolving.
- Danger that this becomes the focus of committees rather than the threshold questions of use.