

The response reproduced below was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on the ethics of research involving animals during October-December 2003. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Office of the Chief Rabbi, UK

Rabbi Dr Michael Harris, who holds the portfolio for Moral Issues in the Chief Rabbi's cabinet would like to make the following comment.

Judaism has always been deeply concerned with animal welfare. Many biblical passages emphasise both that divine mercy extends to the entire animal kingdom and that compassion towards animals is required of human beings. Jewish law contains numerous provisions to protect the welfare of animals and unequivocally prohibits causing cruelty to them.

One expression of this position which is of great contemporary relevance is that according to all Jewish legal authorities, hunting as a sport is prohibited. On the issue of research involving animals, the stance of Jewish legal writers is somewhat more divided, yet fundamentally reflects the abiding Jewish concern with animal welfare. There is significant authority for the position that animal pain can be condoned only for medical purposes, including medical experimentation of potential therapeutic value.

Medical experimentation for the purpose of producing therapeutic benefit to humanity is endorsed by virtually all Jewish legal authorities. However, those authorities also firmly emphasise that such experimentation should always be conducted so as to avoid unnecessary animal suffering and that where appropriate, animals should be anaesthetized.

Office of the Chief Rabbi