



# Meeting Report NCad Stakeholder meeting: ‘Values and considerations in the context of animal testing’

The third of five meetings was held on 16 October 2025 to collect input for the Transition Policy Advice 2.0, on which the NCad is currently working. The meeting took place at the Centre Court in The Hague. Participants from a variety of professional backgrounds and perspectives engaged in moral deliberation based on a case study. The aim was to make underlying values and moral considerations visible and to experience how this type of deliberation can deepen such discussions. Daan Schuurbiens (De Proeffabriek) moderated the meeting, and William Wandel facilitated the moral deliberation.

## Introduction and expectations

During this part of the meeting, a discussion format commonly used in moral deliberation was applied, allowing participants to freely explore doubts and considerations without the aim of reaching consensus or decision-making. For this pilot, strict confidentiality was agreed. For that reason, case details in this report are presented only at a general level.

At the start of the moral deliberation, the participants shared their expectations. Some were looking for practical tools with which to discuss ethical issues, while others hoped for new insights or an open conversation about underlying values.

## The moral deliberation

The facilitator of the deliberation thoroughly explained beforehand the nature of moral deliberation:

- it is a structured dialogue that focuses on making a moral weighing of considerations rather than finding technical solutions;
- it is not a decision-making process, but rather a means of reflecting on one's own actions;
- it requires an attitude of curiosity and an ability to suspend judgment in order to explore personal values and motivations;
- participants do not need to convince each other - it is about deepening understanding, even (or especially) when values differ.

Before selecting a case study, participants explored which shared question could be central to the discussion. The questions that emerged focused primarily on the justification of animal testing, the value of animals in relation to knowledge gained, and the extent to which the current practice of scientific research involving animals can be morally justified. These broader questions formed the framework for the case study.

## Case discussion

The group chose this case as a suitable starting point because it concerned the question of whether animal testing was a necessary and morally justifiable step as mandatory requirement in an ongoing research project on a potential therapeutic agent. The case was chosen because it revealed a clear moral dilemma and because the situation described, gave rise to an actual choice that could make a difference. Earlier phases of the research process for this case had already made extensive use of methods that did not involve animal testing, and had provided convincing evidence that additional animal testing would not yield significant new findings. Nevertheless, it was expected that an animal model would be necessary to convince regulatory authorities and clinical partners to allow further steps to be taken.

The discussion therefore focused not only on the intrinsic question whether animal testing is necessary, but also on the tension between:

- what appears to be sufficiently substantiated from a scientific point of view;
- what the system still considers to be a necessary step in the evidence process;

- and the moral costs associated with the use of animals.

Participants explored questions such as:

- When is animal testing truly necessary, and when is it primarily an institutional requirement?
- How do you deal with the conflict between what is substantively convincing and what is still formally required?
- How do you balance responsibility for potential human benefits with the need to limit animal use?

The reflections revealed feelings of doubt, concern, and tension, as well as the desire to avoid slowing down potential progress and the desire to avoid using animals if this does not appear to be strictly necessary. During the case discussion, it became clear that many participants shared similar values, such as exercising caution when dealing with uncertainty, exercising caution when using animals, and the importance of transparently justifying the decision to use or not to use animals. At the same time, however, it became apparent that participants do not all attach the same value to animals or to potential knowledge or health gains. These differences were explored further in the discussion.

In addition, the institutional context came to the forefront. The discussion revealed that regulations, assessment procedures, and professional expectations often limit the scope for moral choices meaning that researchers sometimes have little room to manoeuvre in practice, even when methods that do not involve the use of laboratory animals are already substantively strong.

#### [Reflection on moral deliberation](#)

The second part considered the process of moral deliberation. Moral deliberation provides a safe space in which to explore moral questions, concerns, and uncertainties. During this deliberation, this was reflected in the openness with which participants shared their doubts and considerations, noticeably contributing to the depth of the conversation. Most participants found the deliberation valuable. It provided an opportunity to articulate their own moral considerations and to hear different perspectives, free from the pressure to reach a decision. However, it was acknowledged that this theme is challenging to address within a short practice session and that more time would be required to explore values and assumptions in greater depth.

Participants identified opportunities to integrate moral reflection more systematically, for instance within research groups or other professional contexts. It was noted that discussions during everyday work practice often have a greater impact than one-off lectures. Alternative forms of reflection were also mentioned, such as examining one's own values explicitly in a mixed group, or adding a "voice of the animal" to ethical discussions symbolically.

## Closure

At the end of the session, participants reflected on their expectations. According to the participants, not all expectations were fully met, but the deliberation yielded new insights and was considered valuable. Several participants said that they would like to use moral deliberation or similar forms of reflection more often in their work.

Katja ten Cate, a member of the NCad, thanked all participants for their contribution to this shared experiment and for their valuable reflections on the method of moral deliberation.