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Date

Re Response to your letter dated 23 May 2022

Dear Ingrid Newkirk, dear Janneke Hogervorst,

First, I want to thank you for your kind congratulations on my appointment in your letter dated 23 May 2022. In this letter, you also share your concerns about the TPI's current approach as well as information about PETA's Research Modernisation Deal (RMD).

In your letter, you raise several questions with regard to the Transition Programme for Innovation without the use of animals (TPI). These questions concern several topics related to research, international (European) initiatives, the challenges faced with the acceptance of animal-free innovations, systematic reviews and the funding needed for animal free-innovations. Please note that my recent public debates addressed several of those topics. In total eight motions were adopted by Parliament. My TPI progress report, which I will send to Parliament after the summer, will describe how I intend to implement those motions.

Before addressing the main topics you describe, I would like to respond to your last request, regarding a meeting. I am pleased to inform you that the ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is scheduling a meeting for June or July, with you and both ministries.

*TPI and dialogue*

The Transition Programme for Innovation without the use of animals (TPI) is focused on accelerating animal-free innovations (or new approach methodologies). This approach has proven to connect several important stakeholders, which is a strong prerequisite in this complex and broad field. If we want to succeed in moving towards animal-free approaches, both the involvement of those diverse partners within the TPI itself and the continuing dialogue with other parties such as PETA are crucial. That is why one of my priorities is to setup a dialogue pathway to find common ground between threats and opportunities. This dialogue will commence this summer and we will strive for diversity in this process.

*European Parliament/European activities*

**Our ref.**

DGA-DAD / 22268337

**Your ref.**

2022Z10165/2022D22322

**Encl.**

I agree that the resolution of the European Parliament (EP) is promising. That is why I am pleased to inform you that, together with the TPI partners, we are working on an opinion paper in which we propose some additional actions the European Commission (EC) could take to accelerate the transition towards animal-free innovation, while taking into account the initiatives the EC already supports. As was also discussed during the recent debates, the Netherlands cannot be stricter than the European legislation and regulations. However, with this opinion paper I want to share the TPI's experiences and expertise and I will try to mobilise other EU member states and the EC to consider such an approach and to take further actions towards a transition. The acceptance and implementation of animal-free innovations needs a combined European effort and joint responsibility.

The Virtual Human Platform for Safety Assessment project, as you also mentioned, is a very promising initiative with a broad supporting base. This is just one example of what the TPI partners and others initiate, and beautifully illustrates how we can innovate our current system. I strive to mobilise others (individual member states and/or EC) to replicate these kind of initiatives. I am confident that – in time – international collaborations both within and outside of Europe will move us towards animal-free safety and risk assessments, without compromising health and safety of humans.

#### *Systematic Reviews*

Structural finances for the ZonMw More Knowledge with Fewer Animals programme (MKMD) have made it possible to fund researchers interested in education and supervision of systematic reviews since 2012. The impact of these initiatives and the availability of funding have been publicised in an article (PLoS One 2021 Dec 13;16(12)) and in a case study commissioned by ZonMw. Funding for educational programmes on systematic review methodology, is still available to researchers through the current ZonMw-MKMD programme.

#### *Validation (and/or qualification) and finances of animal-free innovations*

In both recent debates and in my letter to Parliament dated 14 April 2022, I addressed the important topics of the validation and finances of animal-free innovations. I elaborated on my actions and what I consider priorities to improve the chain of information. The roadmaps that are being developed will help to minimise any hurdles researchers and startups experience in these directions. In developing these roadmaps, I will also differentiate between innovations that are still at the beginning of the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and ones that are already more advanced. Additionally, the communication and implementation of those roadmaps have my priority.

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These are just a few of the initiatives that the TPI and our partners are pushing forward to accelerate the transition. I propose that you discuss and elaborate on any questions and suggestions you might still have, both in relation to my response and in regard to any remaining subjects in your letter, during the scheduled meeting.

**Our ref.**  
DGA-DAD / 22268337

Henk Staghouwer  
Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality