

occasional ripples of agreement from a cluster of supporters seated at the back of the half-filled auditorium.

The hearing was part of the EU's move to expand direct democracy by introducing European Citizens' Initiatives, which allow individuals to launch requests for legislation. A proposed initiative that collects at least one million signatures from at least seven EU countries wins the right to a public hearing in the Brussels parliament and obliges the European Commission to consider whether new legislation is warranted.

As Kay Davies, an animal researcher at the University of Oxford, UK, wrote in *Nature* last week, in this case, it is not (see *Nature* 521, 7; 2015).

For too long, activists have been left to dominate animal-research debates in many European countries. Their frequently inaccurate declarations — along with their not-infrequent physical attacks and death threats — have gone largely unchallenged by the scientific community and by the agencies and politicians who support the community's work. This has been slowly changing in the past few years, mostly thanks to the efforts of UK-based scientists and science organizations, who have emerged from their bunkers to set the record straight.

Germany, despite its status as one of Europe's major scientific powerhouses, has lagged behind in this effort. But a recent incident has sparked a remarkable change — one that should shore up support to protect the EU directive.

One of the country's top neuroscientists, Nikos Logothetis, a director at the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics in Tübingen, last month gave up a long and painful struggle to maintain his primate laboratory, which had been targeted by animal activists. Unable to handle the death threats and insults to himself and his family, on 22 April he told local authorities who handle licences for animal experimentation that he would wind down his primate work and continue his work on rats only. This would mean reducing the scope of his research questions to levels still valuable for understanding general principles of neuronal action, but no longer directly translatable to human investigations.

Logothetis's problems began last September, when a German television channel aired a documentary using footage of his macaque monkeys secretly filmed by an animal-activist infiltrator. It seemed to show maltreatment of the animals. The resulting scandal led to a series of investigations that exonerated him and suggested that the behaviour of the monkeys had been staged for the

camera. A police investigation is still going on.

His decision to quit primate work dismayed many of his colleagues, and so did its timing. Coming so close to this week's public hearing, they feared that it would be presented as a victory for the Stop Vivisection proponents. But something quite different happened: a swell of support for Logothetis and the type of primate research he carries out.

First, politicians at the highest levels reacted with unprecedented speed and clarity to mount an unambiguous defence of the scientific use of non-human primate research. The research minister in the state government of Baden-Württemberg, where Tübingen is located, condemned as cynical and exploitative the wild claims that Logothetis's decision implied that research with monkeys was not after all necessary. The federal research minister stated that such research was still crucial for developing treatments for brain disorders such as dementias.

And a new policy of the Max Planck Society to be more open about its animal research showed its teeth. On 30 April, the society released a statement of regret about Logothetis's decision and confirmed its own commitment to continue supporting research using non-human primates. The society's president, Martin Stratmann, a materials scientist who took office last year and who has selected the handling of the animal issue as a priority for 2015, spoke out to pledge greater protection of its researchers against attack. At the grass roots, colleagues in Tübingen launched a petition to support Logothetis that has received more than 4,000 signatures from scientists around the world.

This outspoken support has been echoed elsewhere. Parliamentary debates on animal research in Italy this week, where animal groups have been particularly active in the past few years, questioned rather than accepted animal-activist claims. Sixteen European Nobel laureates published an open letter in UK and German newspapers to rebut the Stop Vivisection campaign, joining a similar statement by 149 major research organizations and patient groups.

The European Parliament has until 3 June to decide what to do. It should listen to the loud and unified voice of the continent's scientists, and then do precisely nothing. ■

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Polls apart

The UK voter opinion polls show that an anomalous answer can be the correct one.

Britain's new Conservative government has barely settled into office, but already the results of last week's general election have got certain members of UK society fearing for their future. They are scorned by the tabloid press and social media; even serious observers are questioning whether the country has been in thrall to them for too long. An inquiry has already been announced.

Opinion pollsters, the media told everyone, were predicting the closest election for decades. Labour and the Conservatives were neck and neck; weeks of constitutional chaos would follow the election as mandarins and officials wrestled with competing and overlapping political claims to power. The small print says that opinion polls should always be taken with a decent pinch of salt. But who reads the small print when there is an election on and a 24-hour news cycle to fill?

It took a single poll of voters post-voting to reveal the truth, which was confirmed as the counted results flooded in: David Cameron's Conservative Party had grabbed 37% of the vote (see page 134). That was nearly seven percentage points ahead of Labour and, crucially, well outside the margins of error of all the previous deadlocked polls.

Amid the fallout, a single polling firm revealed that it had correctly predicted — and then buried — the result. Gathered the day before the election, its poll results seemed so out of line with what everyone else was saying that the firm did not dare to publish them. “I chickened out of publishing the figures,” confessed Damian Lyons Lowe, the chief executive of Survation in London. “Something I'm sure I'll always regret.”

Nature's readers can surely sympathize. The question of how to deal with anomalous data is a centrepiece of research, and the results can make or break careers — or launch scientific revolutions. From the discovery of the ozone hole over Antarctica to the observation that some people seemed unaffected by HIV infection, unusual results — data that make you go ‘hmmm’ — have led scientists to question their methods, their knowledge and, ultimately, their understanding of the world.

The importance of anomalies in science has spawned its own sub-field of research into how researchers respond to them. In the mid-1980s, psychologists supported by US military funds went as far as constructing a bespoke computer program to recreate how Hans Krebs reacted to surprising results during his discovery of the urea cycle in 1932. Others conduct *in vivo* studies by filming astronomers and physicists as they wrestle with unexpected findings.

The ultimate test of anomalous data is, of course, to repeat the experiment. But that demands that scientists have the courage and insight to treat such results seriously in the first place. How many potential discoveries lie in the waste-paper bin of history because the cautious chickened out? ■

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