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Media Release

Patent claims on genetically engineered chimpanzees to be withdrawn

After opposition, Bionomics wants to amend its patent

13 May 2015 / Following a legal opposition against their European patent (EP 1364025), which claims genetically engineered chimpanzees as an „invention“, the Australian company Bionomics has decided to relinquish the controversial claims. The patent will therefore no longer cover genetically modified animals. In July 2013, the European Patent Office (EPO) granted Bionomics the patent covering animals such as pigs, sheep, dogs, cats and even chimpanzees. According to the patent, the animals were to be manipulated with human gene sequences associated with carcinogenesis. About a dozen civil society organisations filed a joint legal opposition against the patent in 2014.

The Jane Goodall Institute in Germany was one of the opponents. “I was always working hard to stop the use of chimpanzees and any other ape in any kind of experiment. Patenting of chimpanzees fills me with horror”, says Jane Goodall Ph.D., DBE, Founder, the Jane Goodall Institute and UN Messenger of Peace.

A final decision by the EPO is still outstanding, but it can be expected that they will accept the changes requested by Bionomics. However, Bionomics still holds other patents which include claims on chimpanzees. Therefore, several of the organisations involved in the opposition will now write to Bionomics calling on them to review their patent policies in general.

„We congratulate Bionomics on its decision to withdraw the controversial claims on chimpanzees. Now we hope that the company will follow up and generally renounce patent claims on animals and especially great apes,“ says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. „We are concerned that such patents amount to economic incentives and will only lead to ever more animal experiments.“

Bionomic's decision is also interesting in comparison to other companies: US companies Intrexon

and Altor Bioscience also hold patents on genetically engineered chimpanzees, but have so far not shown any signs of wanting to abandon these claims. In July and September, the EPO will hold public hearings on the oppositions filed against these patents. Further, on 17 June, a conference will take place in Berlin on genetic engineering, patents on life and the protection of humans and animals.

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The open letter to Bionomics: www.testbiotech.org/node/1255

The Bionomics patent: www.testbiotech.org/node/877

The opposition against the patent: www.testbiotech.org/node/1034

The conference program for 17 June in Berlin: www.testbiotech.org/der-patentier-te-affe

The public hearings at the EPO on the opposition against patents held by Altor Bioscience and Intrexon will take place on 7 and 8 of July in Munich and on 29 September in Den Haag.

List of signing organisations:

- Albert Schweitzer Stiftung für unsere Mitwelt, albert-schweitzer-stiftung.de
- Deutscher Tierschutzbund, www.tierschutzbund.de
- Gen-ethisches Netzwerk (GeN), www.gen-ethisches-netzwerk.de
- Gesellschaft für ökologische Forschung, www.oekologische-forschung.de
- Jane Goodall Institut, Deutschland, www.janegoodall.de
- Kein Patent auf Leben!, www.keinpatent.de
- Menschen für Tierrechte - Bundesverband der Tierversuchsgegner, www.tierrechte.de
- TASSO e.V., www.tasso.net
- Testbiotech, www.testbiotech.org
- Pro Wildlife, www.prowildlife.de