SUMMARY

EU legislation prohibits experiments involving non-human primates (NHPs) unless there are convincing and urgent reasons for such research in the interest of science or society. This position serves as the starting point for the committee's report. Every effort should be made to reduce the number of experiments involving animals, and in particular non-human primates (NHPs), to a minimum. Experiments involving NHPs should only be considered when they are urgently required in the interest of science or society, and when no suitable alternatives are available. The committee considers that experiments involving NHPs are necessary in a limited number of research areas. Such experiments are carried out in the Netherlands in research on infectious diseases (e.g. malaria, tuberculosis, Aids/HIV and influenza), the immune system, neurocognition and neurodegenerative disorders, and social behaviour.

In accordance with the Academy's advisory report of 2001, the accommodation and care given to animals housed at the Biomedical Primate Research Centre (BPRC) has been upgraded to such an extent that the BPRC now sets an example for such facilities around the world. In addition, research involving NHPs in the Netherlands is concentrated at a small number of centres (four in all). The committee recommends giving the BPRC in Rijswijk an even greater role in caring for NHPs and supervising experiments involving NHPs.

The number of experiments involving NHPs, and therefore the number of animals housed in the Netherlands, can be reduced. The BPRC is obliged to acquire a considerable portion of the revenues needed to operate the centre on its own. The number of experiments involving NHPs can be reduced by gradually cutting down on the research that the BPRC carries out in collaboration with external parties. However, the loss of income related to such a move should not lead to a decline in the quality of care for NHPs or their accommodation.

Further reductions in the number of experiments involving NHPs can be achieved by amending Dutch and international legislation on testing the safety and side-effects of new pharmaceuticals on NHPs. Current legislation dictates that certain categories of medicines, for example monoclonal antibodies, may only be marketed for human consumption if tests for potential side-effects have been carried out on NHPs. Recent research shows that testing for safety and side-effects is often superfluous, however. Since few if any tests of this kind take place in the Netherlands, amending this legislation will only lead to a minimal reduction in the number of NHP experiments carried out there.

In order to acquire a clear understanding of the importance of experiments involving NHPs, the results of such experiments must be evaluated systematically, objectively and as a group at regular intervals. This will greatly improve transparency concerning the use of NHPs.

There are various factors that obstruct the search for alternatives to animal testing. Some of these are financial in nature, owing to a lack of funding that supports research into alternatives. Another factor is that the quest for alternatives is not always successful. A related problem is that there are effects and side-effects that cannot be predicted by means of *in vitro* observations, making animal testing necessary for now in order to safely and accurately determine the therapeutic index between effect and side-effect. For the time being, animal testing will also remain necessary in basic research. However, only a small number of biomedical experiments involving animals require the use of NHPs.