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Standing alone for biodiversity

Potocnik opens Green Week. Barroso is a no show.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION faces daunting obstacles as it attempts to set post-2010 biodiversity targets in the next six months, it emerged in Brussels last week.

Lobby groups representing industry and other non-governmental organisations are concerned that directorates general outside DG Environment are not sufficiently committed to progress.

The UN confirmed last month that its member states have failed to meet a 2010 target of slowing the rate of biodiversity loss. The EU had set itself an even more ambitious target to halt the decline of biodiversity entirely by 2010 and will now attempt to meet the goal by 2020. It also wants to convince other governments to agree to the target at a UN summit in Nagoya, Japan, this October. But questions are being raised about whether biodiversity features on the Commission's agenda outside the offices of environment commissioner Janez Potocnik.

DG Environment invited what it regards as "key stakeholders" to a roundtable meeting on 3 June as part of Green Week meetings to discuss progress on its post-2010 biodiversity strategy. These included lobby groups for industry, environmental organisations and national environment departments.

At the start of the meeting, Andreas Baumüller, biodiversity policy officer at the World Wide Fund for Nature based in Brussels, asked representatives from the Commission to identify themselves so that the stakeholders could address them directly. Not a single hand was raised apart from that of François Wakenhut, director of DG Environment's Biodiversity Unit; and Wakenhut was chairing the meeting.

Delegates at other Green Week events also complained about the lack of visibility of senior officials from DGs Agriculture; Maritime Affairs and Fisheries; and Research. Even Commission President José Manuel Barroso failed to attend the closing of Green Week, despite being advertised as a keynote speaker. His message was instead conveyed by video.

At Green Week's concluding session, Karl Flakenberg,

by **Laura Hood in Brussels** lhnews@ResearchResearch.com

director general of DG Environment, promised that he would "personally ensure" that someone from Agriculture would be present at next year's summit.

But according to Allan Watt, deputy science director of the biodiversity programme at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Edinburgh, DG Research at least cannot be faulted for its commitment to the issue. Watt is a member of the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy and says that DG Research has supported the work of the panel from the outset.

"I think DG Research would like to see more research in biodiversity and I think there would be a lot less biodiversity research if it hadn't been for the activities of a few people within DG Research who have really pushed for it over the years," he said in an interview with *Research Europe* following Green Week.

WWF's Baumüller believes that environmental groups have more work to do in getting the message across to a wider audience. "There is a clear lack of commitment of the other sectors towards biodiversity. I think the main reason is because they really do not understand that biodiversity is not only a question for environmentalists, it's a question of human wellbeing and the survival of mankind."

The Commission has so far decided that its post-2010 biodiversity strategy will be based around six areas, these include: implementing sustainable agricultural and fishing practices; acting on invasive species; supporting green infrastructure and addressing the EU's contribution to global biodiversity protection. The Commission will also heed a UN-backed group reporting on the economic value of ecosystems. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) was established by Germany and is headed by Pavan Sukhdev, a senior official in Deutsche Bank.

On 1 June, the Commission and the European Environment Agency unveiled the first baseline indicators for the 2020 targets.

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Champion wanted

Biodiversity is the term used to describe the variety and variability of life—including genes, species and ecosystems. Biodiversity has tremendous value to people, economies and the environment. To take one small example, if humans had to take over the job of pollination, the cost to the European economy has been put at 5 billion euros a year, and that to the global economy at 150bn euros annually.

And yet biodiversity is facing a great crisis. Thanks largely to industrialisation and modern farming, the rate of loss of species is so high that leading conservation biologists think that the Earth could be heading for another mass extinction.

Given the scale of the problem you would expect biodiversity research to be right up there along with climate change as a headline agenda item for our politicians. In some ways it is but in more important ways it isn't.

On the plus side, UN member states have pledged to take steps to slow the decline in biodiversity. Somewhat ambitiously they set a target of 2010, which was designated the International Year of Biodiversity. Not by coincidence this year's Green Week in Brussels had biodiversity as its main theme.

On the minus side, biodiversity researchers are not well organised, they tend to be poorly funded and on balance they lack the clout to be heard in powerful places. What biodiversity ideally needs is a mechanism like the IPCC climate panel to get researchers heard in the corridors of power. But it is probably too late now to set up such a body—there have been several attempts in the past (including one led by France's former President Jacques Chirac) which have run into the sand.

At the start of Green Week, one Brussels veteran remarked that what biodiversity needs is an Al Gore, a serious and respected politician well-known and prepared to campaign tirelessly. He was joking, but he's right.

Nicholas Stern, author of the influential Stern review into the economics of climate change, also influenced our views of climate change beyond belief. His top-line conclusion—that doing nothing will cost more than doing something—captured the attention of the media and policymakers and (along with Al Gore) turned climate change into a global media phenomenon.

Conservationists are pinning their hopes on a young banker from India called Pavan Sukhdev. Sukhdev is leading a study on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity (TEEB). Its inspiration is no less than the Stern review. Like Stern, Sukhdev has top-level support. TEEB was initiated by Germany during its chairmanship of the G8 in 2007. Its backers include DG Environment, the UN's Environment Programme and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

But the TEEB team needs to do more. The real innovation in the Stern review was not the science. It was the linking of economic argument to his team's communications strategy, which harnessed the combined strengths of the UK media, government departments and non-governmental organisations, such as the British Council, in turning Stern into a global celebrity.

If biodiversity researchers want to be talked about after the end of biodiversity year, they must find themselves an Al Gore. And the EU and UN communications people must figure out how to turn Pavan Sukhdev into the next Nick Stern.

elsewhere

"This is a very serious challenge to the way the society operates. In the past we have been able to give advice to governments as a society without having to seek consensus of all the members."

A member of the panel set up to review the UK Royal Society's public statements on climate change worries that it may not be possible to reach agreement among its fellows. BBC News Online, 27/5/10.

"The criterion was established to get scientists out of their ivory towers and connect them to society."

Arden Bement, director of the US National Science Foundation, explains why the agency will not even consider a proposal unless it explicitly includes activities to demonstrate the project's 'broader impacts' on science or society. Nature, 26/5/10.

"There's just no possible way a reviewer would have picked this up."

Cynthia Dunbar, editor-in-chief of the journal *Blood*, says a 12-page anonymous letter led to the retraction of three papers on drug sensitivity in leukaemia from two journals after a PhD student fudged immunofluorescence images. The Scientist, 1/6/10.

"The EU target is 3 per cent. We think it should be between 1.4 and 2 per cent."

Traicho Traikov, Bulgaria's minister of economy, energy and tourism, says the EU's target for R&D spending as a percentage of GDP is too high. Dnevnik, 25/5/10.

"He has said he will do everything in his power to pay the money back to the Red Cross and the Swedish Cancer Society."

Leif Silbersky, lawyer for Johan af Donner, says his client, jailed for five years for fraud, will pay back the money he stole from the charities he worked for. Svenska Dagbladet, 26/5/10.

"Business is not known to be trustworthy when telling stories."

Herbert Picher, a vice-president with controversial Scandinavian packaging firm Stora Enso, comments on accusations of 'green-washing' at last week's protest-beset EU Green Week conference in Brussels. Inter Press news agency, 3/6/10.

decade

"The major indicators will be decided at this meeting."

José Mariano Gago, the Portuguese science minister, says EU research ministers are looking to agree general indicators for benchmarking national research policies.

Research Europe, 15 June 2000

what's going on

ERAC replaces CREST in ERA reviewing role

Research ministers are to rename CREST, the European Council's science-advice body, as the European Research Area Committee. A Competitiveness Council statement on 28 May says the committee of member state representatives chaired by the Commission, will "provide strategic input to the Council, Commission and Members States" on any research issue relevant to the ERA and review all ERA-related groups. Members of the European Research Area Board will meet the Commission this week to discuss how the two groups will interact.

Parliament announces energy research fund

The European Parliament has announced pan-European funding for low-carbon and low-energy technologies. The energy research fund was announced as part of the European Energy Community, a strategy to tackle energy problems across Europe, presented by Jerzy Buzek, the Parliament's president, on 1 June. The amount the fund will hold and other details were due to be discussed at the Towards a European Energy Community for the 21st Century conference in Brussels this week.

Member states fail to agree over ITER funding

The European Union's Competitiveness Council has failed to agree how to continue funding for the ITER nuclear-fusion project in Cadarache, France. A document EU officials prepared for the meeting of 27 research ministers showed that Europe's share of ITER's construction costs would be 7.2 billion euros, almost three times the original estimate; 1.4 billion euros would be needed before the end of 2013. The meeting, on 26 May, set up a task force to decide how to solve the problem. Research commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn is urging ministers to find a solution before the ITER Council's mid-June meeting.

Framework 7 evaluation questions published

The European Commission has published a series of questions to be addressed by the Framework 7 Interim Evaluation this year. A document released on 1 June says the evaluation will address the programme's efficiency, research objectives and excellence. A whole section will be dedicated to the funding provided by the Framework Programme, and whether this is enough, too much, or should be increased.

Correction: the European Research Council

In our 27 May Cover story *Simpler Framework will combat profiteering* we wrote that the European Research Council has called for application procedures to be simplified across the whole of the Framework programme. We also attributed to an ERC spokeswoman a statement saying that Framework would not need consultants if their applications were as simple as those of the ERC. We accept that the ERC and its representatives have made no such announcements or statements and that they do not hold the views attributed to them. We apologise for this error, which was introduced during editing and are happy for the record to be corrected.

We would also like to clarify our page 5 News story in the same issue *Nowotny plans third ERC funding stream to help wider spectrum of researchers*. The scientific council is considering setting up a new funding stream, potentially in 2012, though discussions are still at an early stage. Beginning in 2011, there will be separate grants for "Starters" (2-6 years post PhD) and "Consolidators" (6-12 years).

europe

Commission slams fragmented EU-African collaboration

Science projects with African countries will not have lasting impact without more coordination among EU governments and member states, a European Commission report has found.

European efforts to build up lasting and sustainable research projects in Africa are too fragmented and diverse, says the report *The Changing Face of EU-African Cooperation in Science and Technology*. It states that the partnerships are not delivering results that justify the time and resources being spent on science with Africa.

Many of the problems tackled today are the same as 40 years ago, says Cornelia Nauen, a senior policy adviser in the Commission. "On the African side, there have been significant efforts to better organise and develop their own pan-African research agenda," she says. If the Europeans did the same they could create interesting projects, which became part of a larger whole, she adds.

The report, published on 28 May, mirrors real life. Niels Keijzer, a programme officer at the European Centre for Development Policy Management, says that funding instruments in different member states are often designed with different objectives in mind. "Some are more concerned with the quality of the academic outputs of the

by Inga Vesper

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collaboration, while others are more concerned with the quality of the research cooperation," he says. "And regardless of the complexity of instruments, what many of them have in common is that African researchers rarely lead in the collaboration."

The report calls on two EU agencies, the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation and the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership in Science and Technology, to identify joint future projects.

European research organisations often fail to listen to their African partners, says the Commission. It urges Europeans to treat Africa's scientists as equals: this would help solve problems in the long term and help Europeans benefit from African knowledge.

"Many Africans have most valuable experiences concerning climate change, because they have survived extreme situations like the Sahel drought," says Nauen. "This is a benefit of international collaboration: developing new sources of knowledge in fields that were only seen as problem areas before."

See View, page 7.

For innovation look beyond R&D, say economists

Efforts to measure innovation must look at all the activities that make a business grow and not just science and technology, a report by the OECD says.

"The OECD innovation strategy takes the view that it was quite appropriate in the 1950s to think of innovation to be essentially R&D," says Jonathan Haskell, professor of economics at Imperial College London, whose work contributed to the report, *Measuring Innovation; A new perspective*. "But if you look at easyJet for example, everybody would say they're an innovative company, but they don't employ a single scientist." R&D, like software, design and marketing, is just one "intangible asset".

Better capturing the evolution from manufacturing to knowledge economies will help create policies that better drive growth, says Stian Westlake, director of policy at the UK's National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, which is also developing an innovation index. "There are a lot of people who will talk about what percentage of GDP you spend on R&D," says Westlake. "Our argument would be that you should set a target for intangible investment, which might be 16 or 17 per cent."

The OECD's indicators look more closely at the output

by Elizabeth Gibney

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from investment says Andrew Wyckoff, the organisation's director of science, technology and industry. For example, the OECD looks at "top-cited" scientific publications rather than just publications in general. But it is also improving its tracking of inputs, looking at indirect business support, such as through R&D tax credits, alongside direct investment.

The OECD report was published as the research commissioner, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, established a panel to develop a set of innovation indicators for the Commission, on which the OECD will advise.

The panel, to be chaired by Andreu Mas-Colell, secretary general of the European Research Council, will use a broad definition for innovation, including effects on quality of life and public services, and will compare member states as well as Europe and its competitors.

A spokesman for Geoghegan-Quinn told *Research Europe* that though spending 3 per cent of GDP on research remains an EU target, the Commission's new indicators will be an attempt to measure the effects of innovation policies.

DG Environment considers research fund

The European Commission's environment directorate is looking at ways of funding biodiversity researchers following concerns from scientists that existing EU funding is not filling basic knowledge gaps in biodiversity loss.

Joaquim Capitão, deputy head of unit at DG Environment, said that he was aware that researchers who do basic conservation science have difficulty finding funding. Capitão is responsible for the directorate's 2.1-billion-euro biodiversity fund called LIFE. "One of my concerns in the LIFE project has been the insufficient involvement of the research community," he said in an interview with *Research Europe*. "We need to build a bridge—and force it if necessary."

Capitão was speaking following a conference of LIFE grantees in Brussels at the end of May. The fund's recipients were invited to help shape its next phase, which starts after 2013. The consensus among the scientists was that the needs of basic conservation biology are not being met either through LIFE or through Framework 7.

One grantee said that without detailed knowledge of individual species, conservation efforts would always be hit-and-miss. Another asked whether a solution lay in better coordination between LIFE and Framework 7.

However, Costas Thanos, a biologist at the University of Athens said that it would be better if the LIFE project created its own research fund, instead of trying to force a connection between LIFE and Framework 7.

The EU has a new target to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 (see *News*, page 1). However, a critical problem is a lack of scientific knowledge: researchers have little idea

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how many species are out there. Estimates vary between 3 million and 100m, of which some 1.8m have been identified. Conservationists need to know how to identify species. They also need to know the threats that species face, the sources of these threats and how best to conserve species.

Improving such knowledge, however, is not a priority for LIFE. The fund concentrates on practical conservation, often in Europe's designated protected areas, known as Natura 2000. In addition, LIFE grantees need to raise 50 per cent of their finance from other sources. Application procedures are not for the faint-hearted and evaluations do not give weight to scientific publications—all of which makes it difficult for researchers.

Research around individual species is also less of a priority for the Framework Programme, which instead tends to focus on the social and economic side of biodiversity, building scientific networks, and communicating biodiversity to the public and policymakers. The environment budget of Framework 7 is 1.9 billion euros—nearly twice that of Framework 6.

At a press briefing at the start of Green Week in Brussels, environment commissioner Janez Potocnik said tough measures were needed to conserve Europe's biodiversity. Asked by *Research Europe* whether research funding would increase he said: "I am convinced that one of the problems in biodiversity is a lack of knowledge and we need to do things to improve it."

europe Budget DG backs proposals to in brief simplify funding

The European Commission is to waive interest fees on 'pre-financing' and introduce payment based on output. Budget commissioner Janusz Lewandowski announced on 28 May that some proposals put forward by the Commission in late April were backed by his DG.

Research DG asks for continued US collaboration

The research commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn urged the United States to continue to collaborate with Europe despite looming funding shortages during her first official visit to the US. The commissioner visited Washington from 27 May to 1 June, and held meetings with members of Congress and senior researchers.

Commission funds renewal of systems biology

A group of 16 systems biology research projects, set to receive 24 million euros from Framework 7, was launched on 25 May. The ERASYBIO (European Research Area for Systems Biology) projects will address challeng-

es such as food security, diseases and ageing. A total of 85 research groups from 14 countries will work to solve some of today's pan-European challenges, coordinated by the UK's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

Commissioner welcomes Finland's 4 per cent target

Laszlo Andor, the employment commissioner, has congratulated Finland on its target of spending 4 per cent of GDP on research by 2020, saying that the financial crisis must not stand in the way of increased research funding. Andor told Finnish researchers and policymakers in Helsinki, on 25 May, that Finland's decision to set its research spending target at 4 per cent was brave and an example to other research leaders in Europe.

ERC announces additional eight advanced grants

Eight researchers, three from the UK, two from Germany, two from the Netherlands and one from Spain, have won European Research Council Advanced Grants after extra funds were made available. This year's funding round of 515 million euros went to a total of 244 applicants.

Research universities demand a say in FP8

Europe's research-intensive universities are calling for more consultation with the Commission on shaping the next framework programme.

Concerns about suggestions to allocate some Framework 8 funding based on research outputs have prompted the League of European Research Universities to demand more consultation with the Commission. In its suggestions for Framework 8, LERU states that major changes in funding have to be agreed by the whole research community rather than just set by the policymakers.

"What is output, how is it going to be measured," asks Stijn Delaure, an EU research policy adviser at LERU. "The scientists need to define this, and not the European Commission or any other administration. It is really important to have a broader discussion on this."

LERU published its suggestions for the next Framework Programme on 7 June. The move towards output-based funding was proposed by the European Commission in April as part of a communication on simplifying the funding process. However, LERU expressed concerns that this move might bring about additional complexities, which could be avoided by simplifying the existing funding regulations.

The Commission says that it is planning to discuss the

by Inga Vesper

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Framework Programme with all interested parties. "On FP8 we are planning open and comprehensive consultation on all issues including the ones set out by LERU," a spokesman for the Commission told *Research Europe*. "The main consultation is likely to begin in early 2011."

LERU has also called for an increase in the programme's budget, most notably for the European Research Council. The ERC has brought new ideas to the European research community and helped attract excellent researchers to Europe, says Delaure, therefore it needs more money.

The group also wants a better balance between impact-driven and science-driven research, with a massive funding increase for frontier research. LERU favours a general increase in funding under the Framework Programme, saying that politicians have to show their dedication to science. "Europe politically agreed on the 3 per cent rule for R&D expenditures, but is far from reaching this," says Delaure. "Europe vigorously discussed, agreed upon, and is implementing climate-change and environment related regulations, but where is the courage to do this for research and innovation?"

University group discusses future ranking system

Universities in European capitals have entered the debate about what makes an effective university ranking system.

During a meeting on 28 May in Tallinn, Estonia, rectors discussed the possibility of setting up a pan-European higher education ranking system, and debated which parts of university life should be covered. The rectors, who are members of the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (Unica), were being briefed on the first findings of a core group on research evaluation that was set up in February.

"Rankings need to be multidimensional. We aim to define the strong and weak points that research rankings take into account," says Veronique Halloin, the secretary general of the FNRS, the fund for scientific research in French-speaking Belgium, and member of the group. "We also need to take care when we collect the data, because many aspects, for example citations, are rated differently in different countries."

Rectors agreed that factors such as networking and knowledge transfer should be taken into account, but that scientific citations should form the base of any ranking system. However, some said that it would be difficult for European universities to measure citations in university-industry joint publications, and that a ranking system must address this.

by Inga Vesper in Tallinn

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Maria-Amelia Martins Loucao, the pro-rector of the University of Lisbon, also highlighted the need for individual approaches to different research subjects. "It is very difficult to evaluate literature or humanities research," she told the conference. "These subjects need a different approach than hard science to receive recognition."

The rectors will draw information from existing research rankings in Europe, such as the UK's Research Assessment Exercise and the German Exzellenzinitiative, which allocate funding according to the best research. "However, all three dimensions: spending, research and education, must be reflected in a European ranking if we want to see how well we are doing," says Stavros Zenios, president of Unica.

A team from the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies in the Netherlands is already developing a global university ranking system with funding from the Commission. The same group unveiled a classification tool in November last year, which allows universities to compare their performance in six categories.

The European University Association is also looking into the matter, and the European Commission plans to set up a European Observatory for Assessment of University-Based Research.

China's trade with Africa: there's no need for suspicion

In the second of two articles, **Lan Xue** tells Western critics that China's investments in Africa are mostly commercial rather than aid driven.

Trade between China and Africa rose from \$10.6 billion in 2000 to \$106.8bn in 2008. This is impressive but not unusual, given the growth of China's trade with other regions since joining the World Trade Organization in 2001. China trades about as much with Africa as with Latin American and Caribbean countries. This is much less than it does with East Asia and the Pacific, the United States and the EU, in both volume and growth rate.

The EU has long been Africa's most important trading partner, far ahead of the US, Japan and China. Although China is close to surpassing the US in terms of trade volume with Africa, this is still only about a quarter that of the EU. True, oil and minerals have increased as a proportion of Africa's exports to China—75 per cent in 2006. But the same holds for Africa's exports to the rest of the world.

As for foreign direct investment, in the early 1990s China's outward foreign direct investment began to grow from a very low base, followed by a steep rise in the early 2000s. By 2008, China's outward FDI reached \$52bn spread over 160 countries. The most important destinations of China's FDI are the Asia-Pacific and Latin-American regions. China's outward FDI in Africa was only about 3 to 4 per cent of China's total in 2003 to 2008.

Africa only gets a small share of global FDI. In 2005, it was \$31bn, about 3 per cent of the global total of \$916bn. Africa's most important investors are France, the Netherlands, the UK, South Africa and the US. China trailed Singapore, India and Malaysia in FDI in Africa in the early 2000s, but the rapid increase in the last few years now makes China a significant investor.

China's engagement with Africa is much less centralised and more broadly based than is often claimed. Most initiatives are clearly commercial rather than aid-driven. According to an International Monetary Fund report, among the 800-plus Chinese enterprises investing in Africa, only about 100 were state-owned.

Despite the charges and accusations, this engagement has generated tremendous benefits to Africa. That our trade there has become such a contentious issue and even a topic for research shows how deep runs Western mistrust of China. Such misunderstanding causes missed

opportunities and challenges for all parties involved.

The first challenge is for the Chinese aid community. After so many years of providing aid, China needs to articulate its development model more clearly. For many people in Africa, China's approach to development offers a new alternative that they find fresh and more appropriate. China's real impact in Africa may well be in providing a successful example for others to emulate. It has greatly enhanced the self-confidence of people in Africa. But relying on replication of China's domestic business practice is not enough: the principles on which that practice is based must be clearly articulated.

The second challenge is for Chinese and African academics. While China in Africa has been a 'hot' research topic in the West, there have been few similar studies in China or Africa. How and where has China's aid to Africa worked or not worked? How is China's aid different from that of other donors? Is it competitive or complementary to that of others? And how can China's model enrich understanding of the development process? Chinese and African scholars need to address these issues together. The new China–Africa Joint Research and Exchange Programme would be a good vehicle for this. Aiming to contribute to research on Africa's development and Sino-African ties, it will sponsor activities including exchange visits and seminars and publish research.

As for traditional donors, can they be more tolerant and open-minded to new approaches to development aid? For example, China has been blamed for not being transparent in providing aid data. But the way China's aid operates is different from that of traditional donors—there is no simple way to convert one to the other.

If the people of Africa, China and traditional donor countries can learn from each other and work together, many experiences can be shared. There is probably a lack of knowledge in Africa about China and vice versa. Western donors can play a constructive role in bridging the gaps. These collaborations can generate benefits not only for people in Africa, but also in China and the West, and contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

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'For many Africans, China's approach to development offers a fresh and more appropriate alternative.'

view from the top felipe pétriz

Science law underpins Spain's claim to world science stature

The first genome sequence of a Spanish citizen was made public in April. That milestone was part of a collaboration called the International Cancer Genome Consortium involving 200 scientists from 10 countries. The aim of the project over the next five years is to sequence the genomes of 25,000 people affected by one or other of the 50 commonest forms of cancer.

Spain was unable to participate in sequencing the first human genome, completed in 2003, but this time we have the capacity to be part of the team. Spanish participation in this project was possible thanks to the experience we have gained in the study of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia and is supported by an established infrastructure, including tissue depositories and the newly created National Centre for Genome Analysis.

This project, and the sequencing centre that allows Spanish researchers to participate, is only one aspect of the transformation that our country has experienced in recent decades. When Francis Crick and James Watson determined the structure of the DNA double helix in 1953, Spain was still living under an autocracy and rationing had only ended a few months earlier. Now, our country's science base is the ninth most productive in the world and our researchers are actively involved in the ongoing revolution that began in Cambridge more than half a century ago.

Part of the reason for Spain's success in catching up with its European neighbours can be found in the Science Law of 1986. This regulation laid the foundations of our present scientific system. But things have moved on since then, with the number of researchers increasing sixfold and a similar growth in public funding for science. Moreover, Spain is now part of the European Union and has developed a federal system in which each autonomous region has its own competencies in science and technology.

To adapt our regulations to these new circumstances, the Spanish science ministry has drawn up the new Science, Technology and Innovation Law. This has just been sent to Parliament and should come into force towards the end of this year. Our government hopes that this legislation will achieve the broad consensus of the 1986 law and provide the same satisfactory results.

There are five main features to this legislation. It is centred around people; it is designed to improve the effectiveness of public investment in research and development; it aims to deepen the collaboration among different administrations within Spain and with the EU; it attempts to contribute to a more productive and sustainable economy; and it is socially progressive.

In relation to the first of these goals, the law includes a new contractual model for young researchers. From the beginning of the PhD, this will replace grants with contracts providing social security benefits. Moreover, it includes measures to promote mobility both between universities and public research bodies, and between the public and the private sectors. The law will also offer sabbaticals for scientists wanting to set up technology businesses. The objective is to improve our capacity for turning knowledge into innovation.

To achieve the second goal, a new State Research Agency will be established. This will have the objective of reducing bureaucracy so that scientists devote less time to paperwork and more time to planning their research. We want to establish a culture of trust, which doesn't require the sort of *a priori* controls that are mandatory now, but instead focuses on the results of the research.

The third aspect of the law is there to address the potential for duplication of effort that could result from a complex system serving different autonomous regions. To avoid this, the new law creates the Spanish Science and Technology Strategy. This will be developed by the Science and Technology Policy Council, the highest authority for the coordination of science policy in Spain.

As for the fourth goal, the legislation establishes the Regional Innovation Strategy to promote cooperation between regional administrations and other organisations to create a favourable environment for innovation.

Finally, the bill includes elements intended to foster social engagement by scientists and measures to assure gender equality. It will also guarantee open access to all publications resulting from publicly funded research.

In recent years, Spain has made a huge effort to position itself among the leading scientific nations of the world. It is hoped that these new regulations will allow us to consolidate that status and build a knowledge-based economy that is both sustainable and fair.

More to say? Email comment@researchresearch.com

Felipe Pétriz is Spain's secretary of state for research.

'Our government hopes that this legislation will achieve the broad consensus of the 1986 law and provide the same satisfactory results.'

German-Saudi ocean project is landmark for science collaboration

One of Germany's ocean research centres is to collaborate with Saudi Arabia, following several years of negotiation.

The IFM-GEOMAR institute in Kiel signed an agreement with the King Abdulaziz University on 26 May in Jeddah. The project will have funds of 6.4 million euros, supplied jointly by the two sides. The Saudis will help German researchers access deep-sea areas in the Red Sea and supply them with equipment.

IFM-GEOMAR will make the results available to KAU and help train research students from Saudi Arabia.

"After more than two years of negotiations, I am very glad to start preparing our first expedition in January next year, which we will develop together with our partners," said coordinator Werner Brückmann.

The research project will look at the symbiosis between fish and coral reefs, the effects of underground gas outlets on the Red Sea's biology and its deep-sea environment. It will run over nine years and is divided into three sub-sections. The partnership is being overseen by the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, a

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German government institution that supports international R&D collaboration.

In the past the Red Sea region has been difficult for ocean researchers to access because of its special environment, says IFM-GEOMAR. Political obstacles have also played a role, as international researchers regularly struggle to receive permission for projects from the Saudi Arabian government. Project permissions are guaranteed under the agreement, and research ships and equipment from Germany will be allowed in the country.

The project contract was signed after German politician Peter Harry Carstensen intervened on behalf of IFM-GEOMAR. Peter Herzig, director of IFM-GEOMAR, says discussions are ongoing to establish two complementary projects with similar funds.

"This cooperation opens up all sorts of possibilities for first research projects with modern equipment in the Red Sea," Herzig said.

nations in brief

EIB backs Portuguese drug company

The European Investment Bank has provided the first half of a proposed 50-million-euro loan to the Portuguese pharmaceutical company Bial to support its R&D activities. The funds will support the company's work up to 2013 in developing new treatments for epilepsy, cardiovascular disease and Parkinson's disease.

Stiff penalty for former Toulon boss

Laroussi Oueslati, former president of Sud Toulon-Var University in the South of France, has been barred from working in the public sector by a panel appointed by the government, after an inquiry into irregularities in the way the institution handled foreign students. His vice-presidents, Yves Lucas and Pierre Sanz de Alba, have been banned from working in higher education and research for one and three years respectively.

OECD figures show cuts in French research spending

France's science unions and campaign groups are using statistics gathered by the OECD as proof that the government is not investing more in research, despite its claims to the contrary. *Sauvons La Recherche* points out that OECD figures show that research spending in France fell by 1.4 per cent between 2002 and 2008, while in all the other countries on the OECD list research spending increased.

Swiss public research funding on the rise

Switzerland invested 707 million Swiss francs (500 million euros) of public money in research in 2009, the Swiss National Fund has announced. This sum represents a 6 per cent increase on 2008, according to the fund's annual report. The largest chunk, 38 per cent, went to biology and medical research, while 37 per cent went to mathematics and engineering, and 25 per cent to support humanities and social-science research.

Academic innovation funding in Germany

Germany has launched a seed-funding initiative to help academics bring innovative products to market. The VIP programme, Validation of Innovation Potentials for scientific research, will provide up to 500,000 euros a year for up to three years to help commercialise the results of basic research.

Teaching programme agreed by German states

German federal states will launch a joint programme to boost university teaching quality, the German Rectors' Conference has announced. Participants are expected to ask the government for more funding to allow Germany's higher education institutions to improve their teaching.

Spanish award for Touraine

French sociologist Alain Touraine has been awarded the Prince of Asturias Foundation's prize for communication and humanities. Touraine is best known for developing the concept of the 'post-industrial society'.

nordic

Danish universities face post-recession cuts

Denmark's government has announced dramatic budget cuts for research as part of a plan to curb public spending in the wake of the recession.

The plan, published on 25 May, shaves 375 million kroner (50m euros) from planned public research expenditure for 2012 and 2013, according to the country's science minister Charlotte Sahl-Madsen.

University block grants will not be cut, but money will be taken from other parts of the science budgets, including the research councils, Sahl-Madsen told a select committee of members of parliament on 1 June.

She added that universities should be able to make up for the cuts by cutting back their administration costs, allowing research projects to proceed unhindered.

"In the current situation it is important that the universities deliver as much research and education as possible for their public funds. I find it difficult to imagine that universities cannot become a bit more effective," she said.

Universities say they will have to start saving next year to prepare for the cuts. But many doubt that efficiency savings will be enough. Ralf Hemmingsen, vice-chancellor of the University of Copenhagen, has warned that up to 700 staff could be laid off as a result of the cutbacks.

Research quality will also deteriorate, says Claus

by Pia Pedersen

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Emmeche, associate professor at the University of Copenhagen. "Cutbacks this substantial will reduce the quality of research that will remain, because it will become more difficult to recruit the best minds and the uncertainty in the sector will increase significantly," he says.

The cuts will worsen the already strained relationship between Denmark's science ministry and vice-chancellors. Since the country's university law was changed in 2003, block grants have shrunk and competitive funding for strategic disciplines has increased. This has made it difficult for many researchers—especially those working outside areas that the government has highlighted as important to the economy—to earn their keep. Earlier this year, several researchers at the University of Copenhagen were made redundant after their departments could no longer afford to keep them on.

Vice-chancellors say that the government is now falling 2 billion kroner behind its schedule, published in 2006, for increasing public-sector research to 1 per cent of GDP by 2012. The drop in GDP means those projections had already fallen by 1.7bn kroner before the cuts, the vice-chancellors say. But Sahl-Madsen says they are counting money that was never promised.

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Nordics try to stem clinical-trials flight

The Nordic Innovation Centre is considering setting up a pan-Nordic platform in the hope of attracting companies to carry out their clinical trials in the region. NICE, which aims to stimulate innovation across Scandinavia, will conduct a feasibility study during the summer.

The platform would pull together existing facilities and expertise across Scandinavia to combat increasing difficulties in attracting pharmaceutical and biomedical companies to conduct trials. NICE attributes this decline to high clinical-trial costs and small national populations from which to recruit participants.

The initiative stems from a forum held last year, attended by Nordic policymakers and representatives from large pharmaceutical companies. "There was a concern expressed at the meeting that the Nordic countries are losing out to Asia and Eastern Europe, where costs are cheaper and populations higher," says Marcus Zackrisson, a senior adviser at NICE.

The details of the platform are not yet clear, but it would most likely perform a one-stop-shop function for companies looking to conduct trials in Scandinavia. "There are so many organisations, so it would likely be a coordinating unit for these," Zackrisson says, of

**nordic
outlook**

by John Fogarty

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Scandinavia's research hospitals, clinical research institutes and businesses that organise and conduct trials.

The decline is noticeable in Sweden. The total annual number of trials conducted there in the past 10 years has dropped by a third from around 600 to 400, according to Peter Westerling, a manager at Trial Alliance, a clinical-trials organisation based at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

However, in Denmark, Anders Trojel, head of life sciences at regional investment agency Copenhagen Capacity, is more buoyant about the country's clinical-trials industry. "I certainly wouldn't see a decline in that respect in Denmark," he says. However, he concedes that Big Pharma, in particular, could be tempted by the lower costs in the Far East.

Even a common platform may not be enough to save the Nordic countries' clinical-trials industry. If there continues to be better opportunities for growth in Eastern Europe and, in particular, Asia, there may be little the Nordics can do to compete, Westerling says.

"Big pharmaceutical companies tend to conduct trials in the same place where they locate their business, and this tends to be where there are most growth opportunities," he says.

nordic in brief

Norway to head marine project

The EU's 27 research ministers have given Norway the green light to lead an international

research project investigating the seas surrounding Europe, the Norwegian government announced on 28 May. The project will focus on the environmental conditions, marine resources and industries within Europe's marine territories. So far 10 countries have signed up to the project.

Finland sends research expedition to Greenland

The Finnish Meteorological Institute is sending three researchers to perform physics field tests on Greenland's ice and snow and its reflective properties. The results will be used in developing more accurate satellite observations and further research on climate change. The three-week expedition will set off in late June and be based in the Summit Station on top of Greenland's continental ice sheet, the institute said on 3 June.

Sweden needs remote-sensing authority

The Swedish National Space Board has called on the government to establish a coordinating body for organisations involved with remote sensing. The proposed

authority would ensure that remote-sensing organisations share data and that their resources are used as effectively as possible.

Equality projects funded in Sweden

Sweden's Delegation for Gender Equality in Higher Education has awarded 23 million kroner (2.4m euros) to projects promoting equality at 13 institutes. The funding, announced on 28 May, will include support for a project at Lund University aimed at promoting gender equality among future research leaders.

First Norwegian science attaché in China

The Norwegian government has created a scientific advisory post at its embassy in Beijing; the first time the country has had such a position in China. Kari Kveseth, international director at the Research Council of Norway, will take up the post in September.

Vinnova deputy quits for top job at Umeå

Lena Gustafsson, deputy director of Sweden's innovation agency Vinnova, has been appointed vice-chancellor of Umeå University. Gustafsson will take up the post on 1 July this year with a contract that runs to the summer of 2016.

uk & ireland

Ireland's government shocks researchers in push for commercial returns from R&D

Ireland's minister for enterprise, Batt O'Keeffe, has shocked academic researchers by saying that projects with commercial potential must have industrial involvement at every stage. He made the comments at the Competitiveness Council in Brussels on 26 May.

This is seen in his department as an important policy statement. It continues a series of government statements emphasising the need for a return on the state's 10-year investment in scientific research. But it ratchets up the commercialisation message, changing the relationship between academics and the private sector.

"Research teams whose work has commercial potential must be required to partner with industry at all stages of their work so there is no time lost in getting products to market and generating revenues and jobs," the minister said. "In other words, if there is a gap between research and retail, we must ensure that it is closed."

Universities have given the comments a muted reception, and urged balance when seeking industrial links.

John Walsh, deputy chairman of the Trinity Research Staff Association and member of the Irish Research Staff Association board, says that researchers have no diffi-

by Dick Ahlstrom

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culty with industrial partnerships, which could be beneficial. "At the same time, the government is in very real danger of falling into a short-term view of research," he adds. "The present government perhaps seems to be abandoning the long-term view for short-term gains. We would be concerned with anything that was a short-term opportunistic approach."

Research and innovation are two sides of the same coin and Ireland's leading researchers are well aware of the importance of bringing discoveries to market, says David Lloyd, associate dean of research at Trinity College Dublin. He adds, however, that not all research is overtly commercial in nature, "nor should it be mandated as such".

There is clear evidence that investment in university research contributes to the growth of the economy, but the question is how to support that activity, says Des Fitzgerald, vice-president for research at University College Dublin. "This transfer of knowledge from research to retail is often called the Valley of Death because it is so difficult," he says.

uk & i in brief

Vice-chancellors to share pain

Business secretary Vince Cable and universities minister David Willetts have urged vice-chancellors to

help make savings as the government cuts £200 million (240m euros) from higher education funding this year. In a letter to the heads of all UK universities, dated 26 May, they called for restraint on pay and bonuses and a freeze on recruitment. Malcolm Grant, provost of University College London, announced that he would take an immediate 10 per cent pay cut and extend senior management's pay freeze for a further year.

Union leader accuses coalition of 'ignorance policy'

The new coalition government has an "ignorance policy where its education policy should be," says Sally Hunt, the leader of the UK University and College Union. She says the government has prioritised tax breaks over education and warns that a national strike could be on the horizon unless job security improves.

UK to review synthetic-biology regulations

Regulations on genetically modified organisms may be modified in future to cover artificial cells, Parliament was told on 2 June. David Freud, a minister in the Department for Work and Pensions, said he was confident that existing regulations covered the recent work by US entrepreneur Craig Venter. However, he said, "in

the future, there is a possibility that some synthetic biology involving the creation of artificial cells could fall outside the scope of the current regulations".

University philanthropy defies economic downturn

Universities' income from donations rose by 18.8 per cent in 2008-09, a report from the National Centre for Social Research has found. Oxford and Cambridge received just over half the £532-million (640m-euro) total. Philanthropic donations accounted for some 2.3 per cent of universities' income.

Fast-track option for international patents

The UK Intellectual Property Office has introduced measures to fast track international patent applications filed under the 142-country Patent Cooperation Treaty. Applicants may now receive an examination report in two months, instead of 18 months or more. The report will either approve applications or recommend changes.

Improvements in Ireland's IP regulations promised

Enterprise minister Batt O'Keeffe told the first meeting of Ireland's Innovation Taskforce on 1 June that he plans to overhaul Ireland's intellectual-property regime, to help create more companies and jobs in a 'smart economy'. The goal is to "maximise opportunities" and improve competitiveness by making it easier for would-be entrepreneurs to commercialise discoveries.

Malaysia to draw up animal research rules as activists protest over planned labs

The Malaysian government says it is drawing up rules for the use of animals in research as the country comes under fire over plans to establish testing laboratories.

Rofina Yasmin Othman, an under secretary in the Malaysian Ministry of Science Technology and Innovation's National Biotechnology Division, is chairing meetings with representatives from several of the government's ministries to discuss the rules. It is expected that a National Bioethics Committee will be established by the end of 2010.

"This will ensure a strict regulatory environment for the Biotechnology Industry thus ensuring international standards and norms including best practices...in animal welfare," Othman told *Research Europe*.

The Malaysian government has been criticised recently over plans to establish animal testing facilities in the state of Malacca. Malaysian state-owned Melaka Biotech Holdings signed a 112 million euro deal in January with Indian company Vivo BioTech to build a centre that would include laboratories for testing biotechnology products on dogs and monkeys.

The move sparked protests from animal rights groups concerned that Malaysia's lack of legislation would lead to animal abuse in the proposed laboratories.

Animal rights groups, including the British Union for the

by John Fogarty

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Abolition of Vivisection and the European Coalition to End Animal Experiments, started a petition at the beginning of May to try and stop the plans. Addressed to the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak and Malacca's chief minister Mohamad Ali Rustam, it says, "Malaysia has no specific legislation governing the use of animals in research. This would be detrimental to the issue of animal welfare."

Othman says the planned legislation is not a result of the criticism. "The effort is not in response to the recent events but part of our continuing effort to ensure that the biotech industry in Malaysia adheres to international standards and practices," she says.

Rustam sparked further outrage when he hit back at the criticism by claiming a theological justification for animals experiments. "God created animals for the benefits of human beings. We cannot test on human beings. God created monkeys, and some have to be tested," he said.

The EU agreed on a draft animal research directive on 11 May. Pro-research groups have expressed concern that this might drive research into countries where laws are less stringent.

world in brief

Oz and NZ link up telescopes

Six radio telescopes across New Zealand and Australia have been linked to create a giant telescope, expected to produce images 10 times more detailed than the Hubble Space Telescope. The move is expected to boost the countries' chances of beating South Africa to host the 1bn-euro Square Kilometre Array, set to become the world's most powerful radio telescope.

Climate-change treaty 'not expected' in 2010

A legally binding agreement to curb global emissions is not to be expected at the climate meeting in Mexico in December this year, Yvo de Boer, the out-going executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, told journalists on 25 May. An agreement at the meeting in South Africa a year later is "much more likely" he said.

Russia to help Bangladesh with nuclear power

Russia signed an agreement on 21 May to help Bangladesh build two nuclear power plants, reports Reuters news agency. The plants, at Rooppur near the Indian border, are expected to cost up to \$2 billion (1.65bn euros) and to start generating electricity by 2014, Bangladeshi officials said.

Eastern giants to cooperate on environment

South Korea, China and Japan agreed to cooperate on environmental research at a ministerial meeting in Japan on 22 and 23 May. The countries will work together on greenhouse gas reduction, pollution management, low-carbon technology, preservation of biodiversity, dust and sandstorm forecasting and environmental governance in north-east Asia.

India to get ice-breaker by 2013

India's cabinet has agreed to pay for a research ship able to travel through ice. The ship will cost 4.9 billion rupees (87m euros) and should be operational by March 2013. It will act as a supply vessel in the Antarctic, Arctic, Southern Ocean and Indian Ocean and undertake oceanographic research. India has previously chartered such ships on a year-by-year basis.

Japan launches Venus climate probe

Japan launched its Venus climate orbiter *Akatsuki* on 21 May from the space centre on Tanegashima island. The probe is funded jointly by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. Expected to enter into Venus orbit in early December, it will investigate high-speed wind, lightning, and the formation of sulphuric acid clouds.

usa

Federal programme to assess the value of science to the US economy

The National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health have launched a new federal programme to collect and analyse data on the economic effects of government investment in science.

Together the agencies have committed \$1 million (836,000 euros) for the first year of the initiative, which will be based on a successful NSF pilot programme from last year [RE 9/7/09, p18].

The multi-agency venture—dubbed STAR METRICS—was announced jointly on 1 June by NSF, NIH and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. It is intended to help the federal government document the value of its R&D spending in much more detail than was previously possible.

The new programme will receive its data from research institutions that volunteer to participate and the federal agencies that fund them. The government has assured universities that this information will be gathered in a “highly automated way” that poses “minimal or no burden” for researchers and university administrators. Sixty universities have expressed an interest in participating.

“STAR METRICS will yield a rigorous, transparent

by **Rebecca Trager**

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review of how our science investments are performing,” said NIH director Francis Collins. “In the short term, we’ll know the impact on jobs. In the long term, we’ll be able to measure patents, publications, citations, and business start-ups.”

There are two phases to the new programme. The first will use university administrative records to calculate the employment impact of federal science spending through the economic stimulus package enacted in February 2009 and the existing budgets of research agencies. The second will measure the impact of science investment on economic growth, workforce outcomes, scientific knowledge, and social outcomes.

Economic growth will be measured using indicators such as patents and business start-ups. Workforce outcomes will be measured using student mobility into work and other employment markers. Scientific knowledge will be measured through publications and citations. Social outcomes will be measured using indicators such as long-term health and impact on the environment.

usa in brief

NRC updates animal guidelines

The National Research Council has updated its *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*

for the first time since 1996. New information includes the care and use of aquatic species, creating a disaster and emergency plan, and expanded sections on the proper transportation of animals. Recommendations on veterinary clinical care and management and physical plant-related topics, such as hazardous agent containment, are also included.

First-time science graduates spike

The number of students enrolled as first-time, full-time science and engineering graduate students jumped to a record of nearly 109,000 in autumn 2008, according to the latest statistics from the National Science Foundation. This is an increase of 7.8 per cent since 2007, and is the largest one-year increase for 10 years. The data is from the autumn 2008 Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering, co-sponsored by NSF and the National Institutes of Health.

Universities call for budget boost to prevent layoffs

Academics have written to the House Committee on Appropriations to ask for more money for public higher education. University groups want chairman of the committee, Wisconsin Democrat David Obey, to include

higher education in the FY2010 supplemental appropriations bill. At present the bill’s education programme provides \$23 billion to provide emergency support for local school districts to prevent layoffs. The letter also thanked Obey for including \$5.7bn in the bill to address the shortfall in funding for the Pell Grant Program, which allows disadvantaged young people to go to college.

Call for investigation into Constellation chief

Leaders on both side of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee have called for an investigation into the sudden removal of the manager of NASA’s Constellation Program, intended to take humans to the moon. In a letter to the NASA inspector general, Paul Martin, committee chairman John Rockefeller and ranking member Kay Hutchinson ask whether Jeff Hanely’s removal was related to his well-publicised efforts to preserve the cancelled programme.

DoD should open up university research

Department of Defense agencies should allow easier access to non-classified research data, says Ashton Carter, DoD’s under-secretary for acquisition, technology, and logistics. Overall, Carter says DoD awards for such basic and applied science and engineering research should not be subject to US export control laws, restrictions on the involvement of foreign researchers or publication restrictions.

Oil research gets boost in wake of Gulf spill

america at large

UK oil company BP plans to spend up to \$500 million (418m euros) on research into the impact on marine and coastal life of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, in the aftermath of the explosion at the

Deepwater Horizon drilling rig on 20 April.

The 10-year research programme, announced on 24 May, will look at the movements of millions of gallons of oil, and up to a million gallons of dispersant, being sprayed into the gulf to fight the spill. It will also address how effective the dispersant is, and what can be done to improve technology to detect oil and get rid of it in future spills.

BP will appoint an independent advisory panel to design the programme.

Wisconsin researchers may face criminal charges

A circuit court judge in Wisconsin has ruled that nine individuals involved in research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison may face criminal penalties for conducting questionable studies with sheep.

On 2 June, Judge Amy Smith said a special prosecutor should be appointed to examine whether officials at the university laboratory broke the law when they conducted Navy-funded research that used sheep to study decompression sickness by simulating deep sea diving. The judge found probable cause that the sheep involved in the research were intentionally or negligently killed through decompression, which violates the law.

The university said in a 3 June statement that the judge's determination does not mean that any university employees have committed criminal conduct or even that they will be charged. The studies in question were stopped when the university received advice that they might contravene a state law intended to bar decompression as a form of euthanasia.

Stimulus helps decommission Brookhaven reactor

The Department of Energy and Brookhaven National Laboratory have used \$30.5 million of economic stimulus funds to complete the most difficult part of the process to decommission Brookhaven Graphite Research Reactor.

Overall, BNL has received a total of \$70.5m through the economic stimulus package to help clean up the Graphite Reactor and other radiologically contaminated facilities and structures on its site. The entire project is scheduled for completion in 2011.

The Graphite Reactor was the world's first reactor designed and built solely for peaceful research purposes.

Letter from Washington re: California dreaming

The situation facing the University of California serves as a warning about public research universities nationwide, according to Linda Katehi, chancellor of UC-Davis.

US states have been hit hard financially in recent years, especially California. State support for the university's 10 campuses has been cut by 50 per cent over the past 20 years, and by more than 20 per cent in the past year. At UC-Davis, for example, this caused a \$150 million shortfall that had to be addressed within months.

"California is facing one of the greatest risks the state has faced for maybe the last 150 years—that is in the ability of the state to sustain the public research university and to sustain the mission of educating the citizen," Katehi recently told an American Association for the Advancement of Science forum in Washington, DC.

What is happening in California goes beyond a financial crisis—it is the result of many constraints imposed on public universities for more than two decades, Katehi said. A series of amendments to California's constitution has significantly limited the government's power to manage the state budget and make necessary changes.

Many other public research universities across the US are facing similar challenges. State funding comprises only 4 per cent of the University of Michigan's budget, for example. There tuition fees have increased significantly and are now comparable with those of private schools.

The Obama administration's support for research hasn't translated into help for public research institutions facing major cuts, in part because of a rift between national and state interests. For example, Katehi says, it has been difficult to persuade California state legislators and taxpayers that research support provided to UC through the economic stimulus package cannot be transferred to cover the salaries of state employees.

Another obstacle is the national effort to unionise universities, including graduate and postdoctoral students. As a result, schools may not be allowed to make necessary layoffs or to abolish specific academic units.

"There are contracts with the unions that will not allow you to cut on a merit basis, but only on a seniority basis, and that makes it very difficult," Katehi explains.

Public research universities are hoping for federal assistance during these turbulent times, but what form such help should take remains unclear.

The Association of American Universities and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities are studying options for a national higher education agenda. The National Research Council has also convened a panel to explore those issues.

Meanwhile, university groups have asked congressional appropriators to include support for higher education in the fiscal year 2010 supplemental appropriation, citing layoffs and attrition. **Rebecca Trager**

inside out

SEAFOOD DIET Norway's environment minister was invited to Green Week in Brussels to flaunt her ambitious and progressive Nature Act. The law was greeted with admiration until a member of the Spanish press suggested that the country's continued devotion to whaling might tarnish its biodiversity halo. The act is up for the Future Policy Awards this year, but will Norway's taste for whale steak hurt its chances? Perhaps not; the awards are being hosted by Japan.

DRASTIC MEASURES The urgency of the environmental crisis is making once wacky ideas mainstream. So geoengineering, formerly dismissed as the kind of science done in totalitarian states, is the topic of reports and seminars from leading scientists and policymakers. Now it seems that buying up land and putting it beyond the use of people is back on the agenda. During Green Week, conservation groups used the biodiversity crisis to call for the revival of what they euphemistically call "land purchase".

DEAD BALL Australian scientists have given English football fans a further reason to lament the absence of their ball-bending former captain David Beckham from the World Cup. Researchers from Adelaide University have done some research on the Adidas Jabulani ball to be used in the competition this year. Derek Leinweber, the university's head of physics, says the ball is covered in

thousands of tiny aerodynamic ridges. This will give ball-bending aficionados "a really good chance of surprising the goalkeepers," making the competition "very exciting." Interestingly, goalkeepers don't seem to agree.

PLACE YOUR BETS Last week, six men entered a sealed research facility in Moscow to begin a 520-day simulated mission to Mars. For the next 18 months they will live and work like astronauts. Communications with the outside world will be delayed to add to the realism. Of course, a year and a half stuck with the same five people for company—and the fact that they are only allowed to shower once a week—can take its toll, so bookmakers are of course offering odds on who will crack first. Paddy Power has installed China's Yue Wang as the favourite to quit first at 2-1, and the odds sit at 8-1 that one participant will be declared clinically insane by the end. No odds, however, are offered on whether they were insane to get involved with the experiment in the first place.

FAST TALKERS "Planetary boundaries, IPCC errors, ocean acidification and IGBP's climate-change index were all discussed at the thirty-second session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice." We know they mean there have been 31 sessions before this, but the thought of covering all those topics in half a minute is a welcome break from the usual pace of policy meetings.



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