

European molecular biology body set to expand its influence

Munich Julio Celis, head of the Institute of Medical Biochemistry at the University of Aarhus in Denmark, has been elected president of the European Molecular Biology Conference (EMBC). Celis takes up his post at a time when the conference, which has previously restricted its activities to funding the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), is starting to flex its muscles.

Earlier this month, the EMBC formally adopted two major projects proposed by EMBO. These are E-Biosci, a proposed electronic repository for primary literature in the life sciences, and the EMBO Young Investigator programme. EMBC now plans to set up a strategic committee to generate more ideas for expanding its portfolio, and hopes to become a strong voice in research commissioner Philippe Busquin's European Research Area, a plan to create a coordinated structure for research in Europe.

Turtles win in latest battle with US fisheries service

Washington Scientists at the US Center for Marine Conservation (CMC) in Washington are celebrating a court victory in their battle to protect the Pacific leatherback turtle. The scientists had sued the National Marine Fisheries Service for failing in its statutory duty to monitor effects of the fast-growing longline fishing industry (see *Nature* 405, 495; 2000).

CMC scientists, with others from Drexel University in Philadelphia, say that the leatherback turtle is on the verge of extinction in the Pacific. Study populations are showing 20–30% annual rates of mortality. A district court in Hawaii has now extended an earlier injunction on longline fishing in the Hawaiian Islands to cover 6.5 million square miles, while the fisheries service has been ordered to produce an environmental impact statement.

Nuclear pioneer who campaigned for peace

Sydney The eminent Australian nuclear physicist Sir Mark Oliphant has died in Canberra at the age of 98. A student at Adelaide University, where the physics department had been established by William Bragg, Oliphant left Australia for England to study under Ernest Rutherford at the University of Cambridge, and worked with him on a number of classic experiments, including the discovery of tritium and helium-3.

During the Second World War, Oliphant left the University of Birmingham to work on the Manhattan Project, building the atomic bomb, but later became a lifelong

campaigner against nuclear weapons. Returning to Australia, he founded the Research School of Physical Sciences at the new Australian National University in Canberra, and became the first president of the Australian Academy of Science.

On retirement, Oliphant became governor of South Australia and a highly respected advocate of the social responsibilities of scientists.

Patent Office seems to have found the secret of success

Munich The number of patent applications filed with the European Patent Office continues to grow. In 1999, the EPO received nearly 122,000 applications, up 7.4% on the previous year. High-tech applications account for most of the rise, with a 15.6% increase in the area of medical technology and a 25.6% increase in electrical communications. In contrast there was only a 3.5% increase in biotechnology.

The EPO is continuing to recruit new staff to cope with the workload. It can afford to do so. Having been embarrassed by its own financial success, the EPO has cut its filing fees by 40% over the past four years — even so, it has still been able to announce a DM250 million (\$120 million) surplus for 1999.

Faulty installation made cable-car crash

Paris The cable-car accident that killed 20 radioastronomy workers in the French Alps last July (see *Nature* 400, 104; 1999) was caused by a mistake made during installation, according to a report by legal investigators. The report, filed with the local magistrate in Gap, adds that the cable-car had frequently been overloaded, contributing to the eventual breakdown in the clamp connecting the cabin and the cable line.

The group was travelling to work at the Institute of Millimetric Radioastronomy's

observatory on the Bure plateau when the cable-car became detached and fell 80 metres. The facility, with five 15-metre telescopes, is operated by France's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Germany's Max Planck Society and Spain's National Geographic Institute.

'Safe' Alzheimer's vaccine could reduce damage

Washington A vaccine for Alzheimer's disease that eliminates some of the brain disorder's harmful effects in animals appears to be safe for humans, say researchers. They announced preliminary results of the first human trials at the World Alzheimer's Congress in Washington last week.

Tests in mice showed that the vaccine inhibits the build-up in the brain of amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles, protein deposits characteristic of the disease (see *Nature* 400, 116; 1999).

President Bill Clinton later announced that the National Institutes of Health is to spend \$50 million over the next five years to accelerate research on the disorder.

Harvard subscribes to Celera databases

Washington Harvard University last week subscribed to four of Celera Genomics' databases. The multiyear deal, whose financial terms remain undisclosed, is the second that the biotechnology company, based in Rockville, Maryland, has reached with an academic institution.

Vanderbilt University agreed to subscribe in May. Five large pharmaceutical firms already subscribe to a more detailed version of the company's database and bioinformatics tools. But Celera's president, Craig Venter, has said repeatedly that the company will need academic subscriptions in order to survive.

Kimberly Carr

We regret to announce the death of Kimberly Carr from Hodgkin's lymphoma. Kimberly Carr joined *Nature* in 1992 after obtaining a first degree at the California Institute of Technology and carrying out doctoral research at the French biomedical research agency INSERM.

In her editorial role at *Nature* she was much respected by colleagues and researchers for her skill and judgement in assessing and editing biology manuscripts. She also earned widespread admiration as a writer and broadcaster on scientific topics. Kimberly bore her illness over several years with great fortitude, and will be sorely missed.

Philip Campbell

