

## POLICY

### Catch commitment

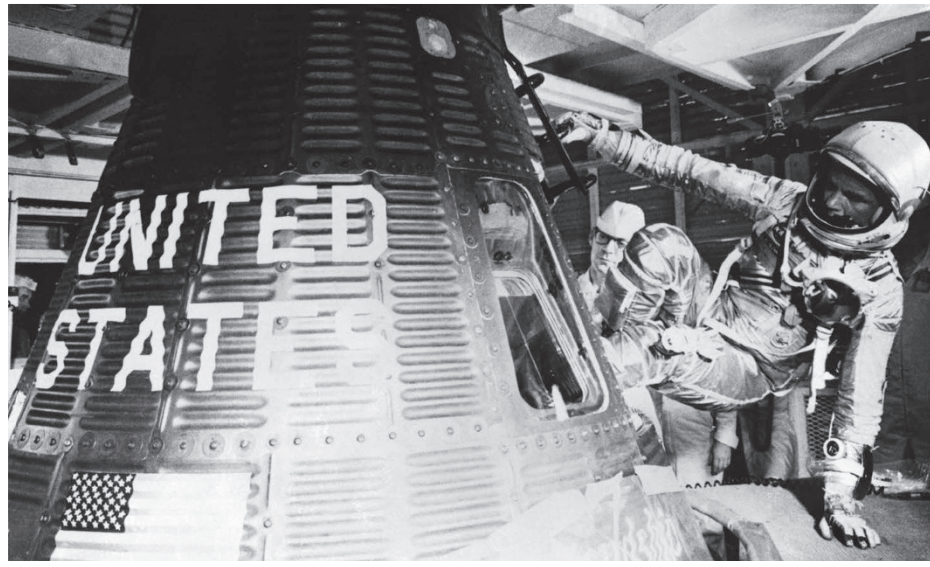
Some of the world's largest seafood companies have committed to clean up their industry in a statement issued on 14 December. The statement is the result of a process started by scientists at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, who in 2014 identified that 13 "keystone" fisheries companies controlled 11–16% of all wild marine catches. Eight of these companies have now agreed to improve their transparency and the traceability of their fish, and to "engage in science-based efforts to improve fisheries".

### Habitat laws

The European Union has decided against overhauling major pieces of legislation that protect birds and natural habitats. Conservationists celebrated after the findings of a review, announced on 7 December, stated that the laws were "fit for purpose" and would not be opened up to reforms that could weaken them. The birds and habitats directives protect more than 1,000 species and 1 million square kilometres of land in the EU. On 8 December, the European Commission announced that it was taking France to court for breaching the birds directive by failing to protect wild species.

### Peatland protection

Indonesian president Joko Widodo announced a moratorium on 5 December on development activities that damage the nation's vast peatlands. The action will, among other things, prevent the conversion of peatland into oil-palm plantations. It comes after catastrophic fires linked to the clearing choked the region's air with smoke last year, causing health problems, as well as an estimated



NASA

## First US astronaut to orbit Earth dies

John Glenn, the first US astronaut to orbit Earth and an icon of the US space age, died in Columbus, Ohio, on 8 December, aged 95. Trained as a Marine Corps pilot, in February 1962 Glenn became the second person to circle the planet in space, after the Soviet Union's Yuri Gagarin. Glenn completed 3 laps over 5 hours

in NASA's *Friendship 7* capsule (pictured). He later entered politics and served as Democratic senator for Ohio for 24 years, working on issues including energy policy and nuclear non-proliferation. In 1998, aged 77, Glenn flew aboard the space shuttle *Discovery* as the oldest astronaut ever to do so.

US\$16 billion of economic damage. Indonesia has pledged to reduce its carbon emissions — the bulk of which come from deforestation and peatland destruction — by 29% by 2030, compared with projected levels.

## SPACE

### Methane problem

India's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM), which made the country's space agency only the fourth to successfully send a probe to the red planet, has a problem with its methane sensor, according to online news outlet Seeker. Measurements of atmospheric methane by MOM had been eagerly awaited, but no such data have been released since the probe reached Mars in

September 2014. A methane specialist at NASA told Seeker that although the sensor collects measurements, a design flaw means that it does not process and send back spectroscopic data in a usable form. The Indian Space Research Organisation, which has not acknowledged the problem, will repurpose the sensor into an albedo mapper, says the NASA scientist.

## TECHNOLOGY

### AI research

Breaking with its usual secretive approach, computer giant Apple announced on 6 December that it will, for the first time, allow its artificial-intelligence (AI) researchers to publish their work. Critics

have said that prohibiting researchers from engaging with the AI community was part of the reason that the company had fallen behind in the field. Meanwhile, Uber, the car-hailing company, announced the previous day the creation of Uber AI Labs in San Francisco, California, in a bid to improve its driverless-car technologies, among other things.

## PEOPLE

### NIH clinical chief

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) has chosen a retired army major general to head its troubled Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. On 9 December, the agency announced that James Gilman, a cardiologist,

SERGEI ILNITSKY/EPA

will join the centre as its first chief executive. In 2015, federal inspectors found widespread contamination in a facility that manufactures experimental drugs and other medical products for the centre. John Gallin, the centre's director at the time, stepped down and has now been appointed its chief scientific officer.

## Trump transition

US president-elect Donald Trump has made a number of key cabinet nominations. On 13 December, he nominated Rex Tillerson, the chief executive of oil giant Exxon Mobil, to be his secretary of state. As the United States' top diplomat, Tillerson (pictured) would have a prominent role in climate policy — such as in negotiating a US exit from the 2015 Paris climate accord, something Trump pledged during his campaign. On 7 December, Trump picked Oklahoma attorney general Scott Pruitt to lead the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt has questioned the science underlying global warming, and is one of dozens of state officials who have mounted a legal challenge to President Barack Obama's limits on carbon emissions from power plants. And as *Nature* went to press, Trump was expected to announce Cathy McMorris Rodgers



to lead the Department of the Interior, which oversees federal public lands and natural resources. McMorris Rodgers, a congresswoman from Washington state, has also expressed doubt over human-induced climate change and has advocated expanding oil and gas development. All nominations will need approval from the Senate. See page 315 for more.

### PUBLISHING

## Anonymity ruling

PubPeer, a website that allows anonymous reviews of scientific papers, has won a key legal battle against a cancer researcher who claims that defamatory remarks on the site cost him a job. In a ruling published on 6 December, judges in a Michigan appeals court reversed a 2015 decision that mandated the site to reveal the identity of anonymous commenters after the scientist, Fazlul Sarkar, sued them. Sarkar can continue to pursue

a defamation case, judges said, but he is not entitled to reveal the identities of PubPeer commenters, whose anonymity is protected by the US First Amendment.

## Impact-factor rival

Publishing giant Elsevier launched the CiteScore index on 8 December — a rival to the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), one of science's most contentious metrics. CiteScore ranks journals using a similar formula to that of the JIF, but it covers twice as many journals and includes tweaks that produce some notably different results — including lower scores for some high-JIF journals. See page 325 for more.

### EVENTS

## Chinese fraud cases

The Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) has released a list of 61 cases of scientific misconduct discovered during 2015 and 2016 in research that it had funded. The cases involve plagiarism, falsified data and images, authorship problems, and faked publication lists in grant applications. Many of the researchers involved were caught using fake peer reviewers. The list, which was posted on the agency's website after a press conference in Beijing on 12 December, is part of the country's ongoing

crackdown on research misconduct. Punishments meted out to those who received the grants — and, in the case of retracted papers, to first and corresponding authors — include publicly criticizing the researchers, revoking their grants, recovering funds and banning them from applying for grants from the NSFC for up to seven years.

### FUNDING

## Climate coalition

Bill Gates on 12 December announced the launch of an ambitious effort to commercialize emerging low-carbon technologies in industry, transport, agriculture and the energy sector. The Breakthrough Energy Ventures fund will be “guided by science” and led by an alliance of 20 of the world's richest people. They aim to invest more than US\$1 billion over the next 20 years in climate-friendly technologies including clean power generation and electricity storage. Investors contributing to the fund, which will begin next year, also include Alibaba founder Jack Ma and Amazon's Jeff Bezos.

## R&D funding slips

Spending on research and development (R&D) by governments and higher-education institutions in the now 35 member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) fell in 2014 for the first time since the organization began collecting the data in 1981. The *OECD Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook 2016*, published on 8 December, also shows that the share of public R&D in total government spending fell between 2000 and 2015 in seven of the ten leading member countries. The three exceptions are Korea, Germany and Japan.

SOURCE: HESA

## TREND WATCH

A UK parliamentary inquiry last week published evidence on how the country's higher-education system might be affected as a result of Brexit, the split from the European Union. More than 31,000 academics at UK universities are non-British EU citizens and may lose their right to live in the United Kingdom after Brexit. Statistics sent to the inquiry by the UK Department for Education show that these individuals are concentrated in the sciences. See [go.nature.com/2hsxra3](http://go.nature.com/2hsxra3) for more.

## HOW BREXIT COULD AFFECT SCIENCE WORKFORCE

Non-UK EU staff make up around 16% of academics at UK universities — but the proportion is higher in the sciences.

