

grants, totalling \$378 million, at its inaugural board meeting in April in New York (see *Nature* 416, 773–774; 2002). But its total endowment of some \$2 billion, contributed by various countries, organizations and individuals, has been criticized for being too small to make an impact on the global burden caused by the three diseases.

Marine atlas to aid ocean management

Paris A new web-based atlas aims to become an oracle for policy-makers charged with managing marine resources.

The UN Atlas of the Oceans, launched on 5 June at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, links to hundreds of maps giving information on fishery resources and ocean characteristics such as salinity, volcanic activity, ice cover and navigation routes. It was created by UN agencies collaborating with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Russia's Head Department of Navigation and Oceanography, which have provided access to maps and databases.

The atlas's editors say that information will be constantly updated for the benefit of policy-makers. But experts think it unlikely that the atlas will remain timely and detailed enough for use as a research resource by marine scientists.

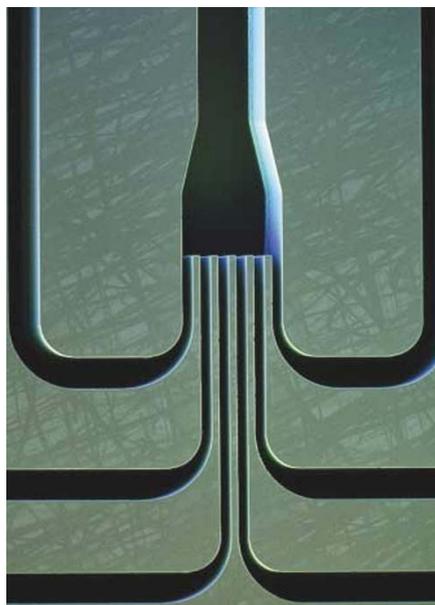
► www.oceansatlas.org

Nanotechnology panel calls for more collaboration

Washington A panel of experts convened by the US National Academy of Sciences has advised the White House to set up a special fund to support interdisciplinary research in nanotechnology. The recommendation comes after the panel examined the National Nanotechnology Initiative, which was launched in 2000 and has roughly doubled federal funding for nanoscale research to some \$500 million per year.

The panel, chaired by Samuel Stupp of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, says that the initiative is going well, but needs to provide greater incentives for genuinely interdisciplinary work. Although the panel's report does not identify any particular missed opportunities, it is enthusiastic about biomedical applications, including nanoscale biosensors and drug-delivery systems, and biocompatible nanomaterials for medical implants.

The report suggests that a special fund managed by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) is needed to encourage "meaningful interagency collaborations" between the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy. This would be an unusual step — the OSTP normally leaves



Small wonder: a DNA-analysis microchip. Will nanoscale devices also find uses in biology?

research funding to the agencies but seeks to coordinate their activities.

Tiny aircraft flies on a shaft of light

Tokyo It sounds like the ultimate in classroom one-upmanship: a laser-powered paper plane. But the device — actually made from folded aluminium foil — may one day lead to tiny inexpensive aircraft for monitoring climate or volcanic eruptions.

Takashi Yabe of the Tokyo Institute of Technology and his colleagues launched their plane by firing a blast of light from a commercial laser at the plane's 'fuel': either an acrylic polymer coating or a droplet of water (*T. Yabe et al. Appl. Phys. Lett.* **80**, 4318–4320; 2002). The aircraft took off into a gracefully curving flight at a speed of around 1.4 metres per second.

Yabe's team is revisiting an idea first proposed 30 years ago. In 1972, Arthur Kantrowitz of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, pointed out that a laser beam focused onto a target could produce a jet of gas that would push it forward, just like a jet engine.

Yabe and his colleagues cannot yet control or power their aircraft in flight. But if the liquid droplet were replaced from a reservoir, sustained flight might be possible. It might be steerable by aiming the laser at fuel on one wing, or the wings could be made of alloys that change shape when heated by the laser.

Correction The News report on the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (*Nature* **417**, 476; 2002) erroneously reported that the United States and Russia were requesting a yearly quota of 280 bowhead whales for aboriginal communities. This was in fact the total request for 2003–2007.