

NEWS BRIEFING

● POLICY

Fossil-fuel drilling: US President Barack Obama announced plans on 31 March to expand offshore oil and gas drilling, part of an effort to establish middle ground as the administration seeks votes on Senate climate legislation. The plans would prevent drilling along the west coast and halt a particularly controversial project in Alaska's Bristol Bay, but open up vast tracts along the eastern seaboard. Last week, the administration also finalized its greenhouse-gas standards for vehicles and announced that greenhouse-gas permits would be required for major industrial sources by January.

Marine protection: The British government has announced that it will create a huge marine reserve around the Chagos islands, an archipelago of more than 50 islands in the British Indian Ocean Territory. The protected biodiversity hot spot covers more than half a million square kilometres of ocean, and will include a 'no-take' reserve where all commercial fishing is banned. The declaration has angered the Mauritian government, which has claims on the territory, and the former inhabitants of the islands, who were expelled four decades ago and are still campaigning for their right to return.

● BUSINESS

Pfizer payments: On 31 March, the drug company Pfizer began to make public its payments to physicians and other health professionals for speaking and consulting on its behalf, and for conducting clinical trials of its drugs. Pfizer said it paid out US\$35 million in the last six months of 2009. It was required to post much of the data by an agreement settling a US government investigation into the company's promotion of its drugs for off-label use. GlaxoSmithKline, Merck and Eli Lilly already publicly report



D. BALIBOUSE/REUTERS

LARGE HADRON COLLIDER ENDS DATA DROUGHT

Physicists have started to gather experimental data from the world's most powerful particle accelerator. On 30 March, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), located outside Geneva, Switzerland, began colliding protons at energies of 7 teraelectronvolts — more than three times the power of the Tevatron in Batavia, Illinois. Almost immediately, the four main detectors around the machine's 27-kilometre ring began recording data from the collisions. Researchers hope that the data will provide evidence of the Higgs boson — a key part of the mechanism that creates mass — among other discoveries. The start-up comes nearly 18 months after a major accident sidelined the LHC for more than a year (see *Nature* **463**, 1008–1009; 2010).

physician payments; this will be mandatory from 2013, under US health-care reform law.

Carbon trading: Greenhouse-gas emissions from around 11,000 factories and power plants under the 27-nation European Union (EU) trading scheme fell by 11% in 2009, according to preliminary, incomplete data released on 1 April. The fall — due to the recession — meant that the EU handed out an excess of 60.6 million carbon credits (free permits to emit a tonne of carbon dioxide), which can be retained for future trading. Steel and cement industries have amassed the greatest surplus. Tighter permit caps are expected from 2013 in the scheme's next phase.

Wind-farm breakthrough: Wind-energy companies have struck a compromise with the UK Ministry of Defence, which was blocking the development of five wind

farms on England's east coast. The ministry has previously opposed these projects because spinning turbine blades can confuse air-defence radar (see *Nature*, **451**, 746; 2008). But under an agreement announced on 31 March, wind developers will pay part of the roughly \$15 million cost for a replacement radar at Trimingham, Norfolk, which can discriminate between wind turbines and aircraft. The project would supply 3 gigawatts of wind power.

SOUND BITES

“Scientific controversies must be settled by the methods of science rather than by the methods of litigation.”

Last week's appeal judgement in the court case of science writer Simon Singh (see opposite) quoted with approval this statement from a 1994 US libel action (*Underwager v. Salter* 22 Fed. 3d 730; 1994).

● RESEARCH

Stem-cell therapy: Twenty-two clinics around the world that offer patients experimental adult stem-cell treatments have been surveyed by the International Cellular Medicine Society based in Salem, Oregon. The study, released on 2 April, provides information about working clinics — such as their cell

MARITIME SAFETY QUEENSLAND

processing and implantation techniques — although it does not rank them. The society has also established a registry to track the health of people who undergo stem-cell therapy. See go.nature.com/ZrAHkc for more.

Synchrotrons and ships: The UK government has approved an earmarked £97.4 million (US\$148 million) to expand the country's Diamond synchrotron in Harwell, Oxfordshire; the facility will get 10 extra beamlines by 2017, taking its total to 32. In addition, on 30 March the country's Natural Environment Research Council announced that it had commissioned a £75-million replacement vessel for its ageing research ship, the *RSS Discovery*. The order, due mid-2013, was postponed in March 2009 — frustrating British marine scientists — because of rising costs due to exchange rate fluctuations.

Arizona cuts: The effects of the recession have prompted Arizona State University in Tempe to withdraw from a much-heralded medical school partnership designed to boost biotechnology research in Phoenix (see *Nature* 446, 971–972; 2007). The University of Arizona in Tucson has agreed to take control of the jointly developed Phoenix medical school, now in its third year of operation. The agreement awaits formal approval by the Arizona Board of Regents at a meeting due to be held on 1 May. Both universities have been hit in recent years by more than US\$100 million each in state budget cuts.

NEWS MAKER



Shen Neng 1
The Chinese coal carrier slammed into Australia's Great Barrier Reef on 3 April, dripping around 2 tonnes of oil and destroying coral.

Agricultural priorities: Financial donors to the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) want changes to the group's plans for reshaping its research programme. The global network of 15 agricultural research centres, which focuses on improving agriculture in developing countries, hopes to increase its budget from about US\$500 million to \$1 billion in 5–10 years. Donors who may

provide that money voiced concerns at a conference last week in Montpellier, France. They want the proposed reform process to be accelerated and for the CGIAR to focus on well-defined problems rather than on broad themes. See go.nature.com/ZhGM3A for more.

Wind reliability: Linking offshore wind farms together with an undersea cable down the US east coast could produce a reliable supply of grid electricity, according to a study published on 5 April (*W. Kempton et al. Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* doi:10.1073/pnas.0909075107; 2010). Researchers from the University of Delaware in Newark studied 5 years of wind data from 11 meteorological stations. They conclude that if wind generators were electrically connected, fluctuations at each site could be smoothed out so that the total power provided changes slowly and never drops to zero.

PEOPLE

Libel appeal: British science writer Simon Singh has won a key appeal in his court battle with the British Chiropractic Association (BCA). The 1 April ruling is of wider significance as it could establish greater legal protection for others wanting to debate scientific or medical issues. The BCA is suing Singh over an article he wrote in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2008; the appeal judgment means that he is able to use the defence of 'fair comment' under British libel law. The BCA may appeal the ruling. See go.nature.com/EQFfg3 for more.

THE WEEK AHEAD

12 APRIL
In London, the Royal Institution of Great Britain faces a showdown meeting: its members will vote on whether to oust the venerable body's council, which in January forced out director Susan Greenfield.

12-13 APRIL
US President Barack Obama hosts a global summit on nuclear security in Washington DC. The meeting follows a review of the United States' nuclear policy.

12-16 APRIL
Weather, water and climate services in Africa are under the spotlight at the First Conference of Ministers Responsible for Meteorology in Africa, in Nairobi, Kenya.

go.nature.com/HV9gSh

14-18 APRIL
Two annual meetings will see debate on a federal rule that allows Native American tribes to reclaim ancient bones found near their lands (see *Nature* 464, 662; 2010). The American Association of Physical Anthropologists meets in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

go.nature.com/7hMvFJ

And the Society for American Archaeology meets in St Louis, Missouri.

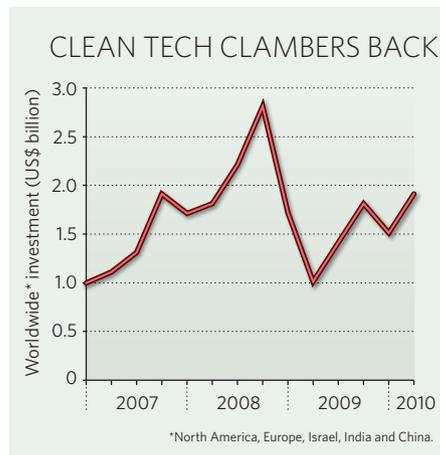
go.nature.com/QdkT9N

BUSINESS WATCH

Brushing off what may have been a seasonal blip late last year, worldwide venture-capital investment in the clean-technology sector in the first quarter of 2010 has continued its recovery from the economic downturn. At US\$1.9 billion, it is now back to levels seen at the beginning of 2008, according to data released on 31 March by analysts the Cleantech Group and Deloitte. The sector includes renewable-energy generation and storage, waste and water treatment, and materials and infrastructure for greater energy efficiency.

Electric-vehicle companies led the charge, with Better Place — a company based in Palo Alto, California, that builds infrastructure for

electric-vehicle networks — raising \$350 million in a January funding round. The total number of venture-capital deals rose to an all-time high of 180, but early-stage investment rounds showed little increase — suggesting that venture-capital investors are interested in maintaining existing portfolios rather than striking out with new companies, says Cleantech's president, Sheeraz Haji. He goes on to say that "private capital may not be as dependent on government stimulus as some in the industry have feared", noting that only one of the top ten deals was with a company backed by government stimulus funds — compared with four of ten in the third quarter of 2009.



SOURCE: CLEANTECH GROUP/DELOITTE