

# NEWS BRIEFING

## ● POLICY

**Carbon storage restart:** The US Department of Energy (DOE) has revived and revamped FutureGen, a public-private partnership to build a coal-fired power plant that would capture and store carbon dioxide emissions. In 2008, the DOE cancelled the flagship programme (a new plant in Mattoon, Illinois), citing a dispute with industry partners over the US\$1.8-billion price tag. But last year the agency said it would restart the scheme. The new \$1-billion project, announced on 5 August, would see an existing coal plant in Meredosia, Illinois, retrofitted with an oxygen-rich fuel boiler, a technique that allows easier separation of carbon dioxide for piping to be stored underground at Mattoon. See [go.nature.com/IyxqJ](http://go.nature.com/IyxqJ) for more.

### Personal-genetics guidelines:

Best-practice guidelines for companies offering genetic tests directly to consumers were issued on 4 August by Britain's Human Genetics Commission, a governmental advisory body. The commission recommends that counselling is offered before and after testing, and that claims about tests are supported by published evidence. The principles are voluntary, but may inform future efforts to set regulations for direct-to-consumer genetic testing, currently being mulled over by the US Food and Drug Administration. For more on genetic-testing regulation, see page 816.

**US energy bill delayed:** Senate Democrats deferred work on an energy bill last week, acknowledging that they do not have enough votes to overcome Republican opposition. The legislation — intended as a backstop after efforts to enact climate regulations were abandoned in late July — promotes energy efficiency while addressing liability and research

## BRIGHT LIGHTS FROM SOLAR FLARE

Beautiful aurorae blazed in Earth's atmosphere after a medium-sized, C-class solar flare erupted from the Sun's surface (pictured) on 1 August. Charged particles from the flare, one of the fastest-moving ejections observed in recent years, caused the heavenly phenomenon when they hit Earth's magnetic field on 3–4 August. The ejection is part of the Sun's expected rousing into activity following an unusually long period of calm. The flare coincided with a tumult of activity on the Earth-facing side of the Sun, and was imaged by NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory, which became operational in late April.

issues related to oil spills and offshore drilling. The Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid (Democrat, Nevada), said on 3 August that Democrats would take up the issue again after the summer recess, in September.

## ● RESEARCH

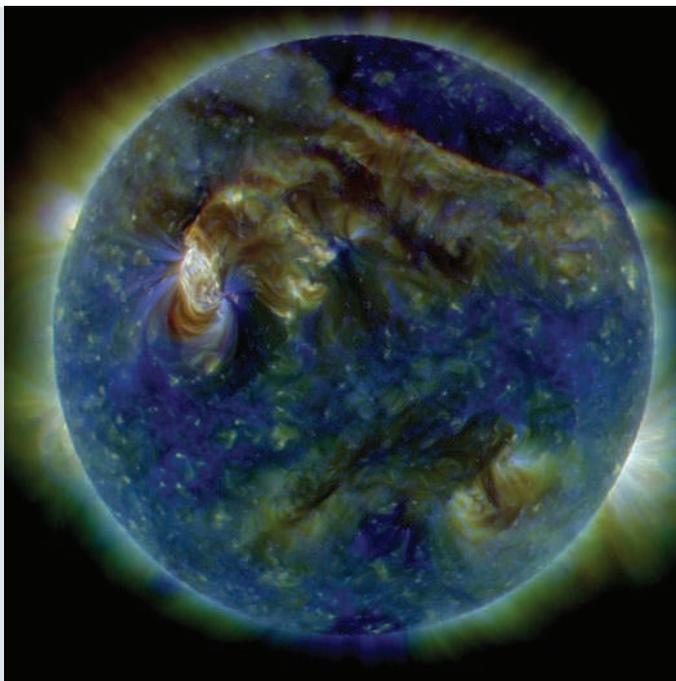
**Roaming GM crops:** A genetically modified (GM) crop has been found thriving in the wild for the first time in the United States. Herbicide-resistant transgenic canola is growing freely in parts of North Dakota, a research team led by ecologist Cynthia Sagers, of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, told the Ecological Society of America conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, last week. The discovery is not unexpected, but highlights a lack of proper monitoring and control of GM crops in the United States, the researchers said. See [go.nature.com/BLQPLO](http://go.nature.com/BLQPLO) for more.

**Oyster genome:** The genomics institute BGI in Shenzhen, China, says it has sequenced the oyster genome. Co-leaders on the project said the 20,000 genes

would provide, among other things, clues to better oyster breeding and to understanding how the molluscs stick to ships and pipes. When the genome was announced to the press on 5 August, it had not been published in a peer-reviewed journal — not an unusual practice for the institute, which wants to sequence the genomes of 1,000 plant and animal species over the next two years (see *Nature* 464, 22–24; 2010).

**Retraction sought:** The journal *Science* last week asked authors to retract a controversial 2009 paper (A. Belouqui *et al. Science* 326, 252–257; 2009) that claimed to have created a 'reactome' chip able to analyse all enzymes in biological preparations, such as bacterial extracts. Some organic chemists had challenged the claim and an investigation in Spain last month recommended retraction (see *Nature* 466, 540–541; 2010). See [go.nature.com/7hEINW](http://go.nature.com/7hEINW) for more.

**Arctic iceberg:** A 260-square-kilometre chunk of ice has broken free from the Petermann glacier on the Greenland ice sheet. The iceberg, which



NASA/SDO/AIA

## SOUND BITES

**“These negotiations have, if anything, gone backwards.”**

Connie Hedegaard, European commissioner for climate change, reflects on 6 August at the end of a frustrating week of United Nations climate talks in Bonn, Germany.

started drifting on 5 August, is the largest to calve in the Arctic since 1962, according to Andreas Muenchow, of the University of Delaware in Newark, who monitored the event. The iceberg is heading for the deep Nares Strait, a key waterway for shipping.

**Seismic injunction:** Scientists from the Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research (AWI) in Bremerhaven, Germany, said that they were “surprised and disappointed” after an injunction granted on 8 August prevented the start of their planned marine seismic survey in Lancaster Sound, near Canada’s Baffin Bay. The RV *Polarstern* ice-breaker was to have studied plate tectonics and crustal evolution in the area, but the Qikiqtani Inuit Association in Iqaluit, Nunavut, sought an injunction against the tests, arguing that acoustic pulses could harm marine mammals and that Inuit communities had not been sufficiently consulted by the Canadian government.

**● BUSINESS**

**Drug deal:** The Dublin-based pharmaceutical company Shire is set to buy Movetis, a drug firm based in Turnhout, Belgium, for €428 million (US\$569 million). The deal, announced on 3 August, will add constipation treatment Resolor (prucalopride) to Shire’s portfolio of drugs for gastrointestinal disease. This is one of three specialist areas for the drug maker, which also makes treatments for attention-

**NUMBER CRUNCH**  
**17**

**The number of nations that have set or matched their all-time record high temperatures so far this year — giving 2010 the most national extreme-heat records in a single year.**

*Source: Jeff Masters, director of meteorology for WeatherUnderground.com*

deficit hyperactivity disorder and rare genetic disorders such as Fabry’s disease.

**Oil-well seal awaited:** The first of two relief wells being drilled to permanently prevent oil from leaking into the Gulf of Mexico is likely to intersect the blown-out Macondo well on 15 August, BP said this week. The company has already capped and cemented over the well, but

it plans to pump cement and drilling fluid through the relief well, which would complete the sealing operation. BP said on 9 August that the oil spill had cost it US\$6.1 billion so far, not including a \$3-billion deposit to what will become a \$20-billion fund for compensation claims. See page 802 for more.

**Amazon payments:** Ecuador has signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to refrain from drilling oil in an area of the Amazon for 10 years in exchange for some US\$3.6 billion from wealthy nations, roughly half the market value of the oil that could be extracted. Ecuador first put forward the idea three years ago and is still working to secure support from the international community. If successful, the proposal would prevent more than 400 million tonnes of carbon emissions and create a sustainable development trust fund to be administered by the UNDP.



**● PEOPLE**

**NOAA chief scientist:** The US government on 5 August nominated Scott Doney (pictured) as chief scientist of

**THE WEEK AHEAD**

**13 AUGUST**  
**The astronomy and astrophysics decadal survey is set to be published by the US National Academies, based in Washington DC. It will recommend research activities to be funded for 2013-22.**

▶ [go.nature.com/i3v1QJ](http://go.nature.com/i3v1QJ)

**15-18 AUGUST**  
**Ottawa, Canada, hosts the third International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry conference on green chemistry. Topics include making industrial chemicals from renewable resources, and with less harmful solvents.**

▶ [www.icgc2010.ca](http://www.icgc2010.ca)

**17-21 AUGUST**  
**Stem cells, epigenetics and research into ageing merge at a biennial meeting on the mechanisms and models of cancer at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories, New York.**

▶ [go.nature.com/Wz9e7k](http://go.nature.com/Wz9e7k)

the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA). Doney, a marine geochemist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, will take up a role that has been vacant since 1996, when Kathryn Sullivan, a former NASA astronaut, stepped down. Marine ecologist Jane Lubchenco reinstated the position when she became head of NOAA last year.

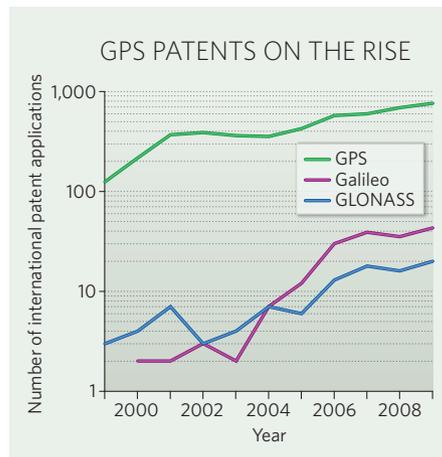
T. KLEINDINST, WHOI

**BUSINESS WATCH**

Companies developing satellite-based navigation technology are turning their attention to Galileo, Europe’s ambitious and long-delayed satellite-navigation system. A report from Withers and Rogers, an intellectual-property law firm based in London, found that around 40 international patent filings annually now mention the system (see chart), which will consist of at least 22 satellites and is scheduled to begin operations in early 2014.

Two other global satellite navigation systems are challenging the dominance of the US Global Positioning System (GPS, also a catch-all acronym used by any satellite-navigation patent). Russia has almost finished renewing

its GLONASS network, originally put into operation in 1995; it plans to launch three satellites in September, to add to the 21 currently in operation. And 1 August saw the launch of the fifth satellite in China’s Compass system (also known as Beidou), a planned network of more than 30 orbiters. Most patents for satellite-navigation technology are filed by large corporations such as Qualcomm, Nokia and Motorola, and relate to improving algorithms that process satellite signals, says Nick Wallin, a patent attorney at Withers and Rogers. Many inventions focus on multi-protocol chips in mobile phones, which integrate GPS receivers and other circuits.



SOURCE: WITHERS AND ROGERS/WIPO