

# NEWS BRIEFING

## ● POLICY

**Stimulus sized up:** The administration of US President Barack Obama released its first analysis of the impact of the 2009 economic stimulus package on technological advances in science and health. The 24-August report, which focuses on the \$100 billion spent on 'innovative and transformative programmes' within the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, highlights the results of investments in transportation technologies, renewable energy, broadband Internet and medical research. The largest chunk, around \$30 billion, went towards alternative-energy enterprises such as wind and solar industries. See [go.nature.com/Hjmq3d](http://go.nature.com/Hjmq3d) for more.

**Gene-test rules:** Companies that sell health-related genetic tests to consumers should come under greater scrutiny and regulation, says the European Society of Human Genetics (ESHG) in a policy paper published on 25 August (ESHG *Eur. J. Hum. Genet.* doi:10.1038/ejhg.2010.129; 2010). The society says that medical professionals should be involved in recommending and interpreting tests, and it calls for national and Europe-wide standards to be set for laboratory practices, advertising and informed-consent procedures. The ESHG concludes that governments of European nations should step in and regulate the nascent industry, a move that the US Food and Drug Administration is also considering. See [go.nature.com/OnDk1b](http://go.nature.com/OnDk1b) for more.

**Vaccine investigation:** The European Medicines Agency launched a review on 27 August to investigate whether there is a link between Pandemrix — British drug maker GlaxoSmithKline's vaccine against the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus — and a handful of cases of narcolepsy. The rare sleeping disorder has been



M. BRICE/CERN

## PARTICLE DETECTOR CROSSES THE ATLANTIC

After 15 years of development, a giant US\$2-billion particle detector arrived at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on 26 August, having been put on a plane (pictured) in Geneva, Switzerland. The Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer — designed to measure cosmic rays from a perch on the International Space Station — has been tested at CERN, Europe's particle-physics lab near Geneva. Its launch was delayed by the loss in 2003 of the space shuttle *Columbia* and, more recently, by swapping the detector's primary magnet for a weaker, permanent one (see *Nature* **464**, 1252; 2010). Launch on the space shuttle *Endeavour* is scheduled for February 2011.

reported in up to 15 vaccinated children in Finland and 12 in Sweden. Finland's National Institute for Health and Welfare announced on 25 August that it was suspending vaccination with Pandemrix until the putative link was investigated. See [go.nature.com/2RjNbr](http://go.nature.com/2RjNbr) for more.

### Climate-panel overhaul:

The InterAcademy Council, representing the world's science academies, has recommended radical reforms of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to bolster the credibility of the panel's science reviews. See page 14 for more.

**Transgenic titbit:** Genetically modified salmon could become the first engineered animal approved for consumption by humans. On 19–21 September, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will be holding two public meetings on AquAdvantage salmon —

engineered by AquaBounty Technologies in Waltham, Massachusetts. If the sterile fish, which grows fast because it produces growth hormone all year round, passes the 60-day consultation and the rest of the FDA approval process, it could be on US grills in 18 months.

## ● RESEARCH

**Collider case dismissed:** A US appeals court in Hawaii has upheld the dismissal of Walter Wagner's 2008 lawsuit claiming that the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, Europe's particle-physics lab near Geneva, Switzerland, might produce "deadly" strangelets, micro black holes or magnetic monopoles. Wagner had sued the US Department of Energy, the US National Science Foundation, CERN and others. The court said that Wagner failed to show a "credible threat of harm" from the collider's operations.

## NUMBER CRUNCH 500

The number, in millions, of eggs recalled by two US producers owing to salmonella infection.

A. DRUZHININ, RIA NOVOSTI/AP

**Stem-cell standstill:** The US Department of Justice says it will appeal against a district court injunction that has frozen federal funding for human embryonic stem-cell research. The court order is the result of a lawsuit contending that federal funding for such research is illegal because it requires the destruction of embryos. See page 12 for more.

**Particle-lab paucity:** CERN, Europe's premier high-energy physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland, is tightening its belt in response to pressure from member states. CERN's finance committee recommended cutting the facility's budget by 343 million Swiss francs (US\$335 million) — or roughly 7% — over the next five years. The cuts will be decided at a meeting of CERN's council on 16 September. See [go.nature.com/XvmwWF](http://go.nature.com/XvmwWF) for more.

**Arctic endeavour:** The Canadian government has chosen Cambridge Bay — a hamlet midway along the Northwest Passage in the country's far north — as the site for a world-class Arctic research station. Details of the new facility's size and overall cost have yet to be released by the government. See [go.nature.com/cCOz3d](http://go.nature.com/cCOz3d) for more.

● **BUSINESS**

**Biofuel shrub sequence:** Two companies have announced the sequencing of the biofuel plant *Jatropha curcas*. Having achieved 100-fold coverage,

**NEWS  
MAKER**



Vladimir Putin

**Russia's prime minister continued his research career last week, using a special crossbow dart to take skin samples from a whale. Putin has previously tranquilized a Siberian tiger and tagged a polar bear for science.**

Life Technologies of Carlsbad, California, and SG Biofuels of Encinitas, California, say that they will use the sequence to produce a reference genome for the shrub, and to speed up the development of transgenic varieties.

**Boycott averted:** After a 17 August meeting, the University of California and

Nature Publishing Group have agreed to work together to avoid a threatened university boycott of the publisher. In protest at what it said was an attempt to hike subscription fees, a letter from the university's Office of the President in June suggested that faculty members could, if necessary, cease submitting or peer reviewing papers for publication in the group's journals, including *Nature*. See [go.nature.com/PcCRjG](http://go.nature.com/PcCRjG) for more.

**Control law:** Reforms to the US export system, which controls what products and technologies leave the country, were due to be announced by President Barack Obama as *Nature* went to press. According to an overview released by the White House on 30 August, the new export-control system will be tiered to distinguish between high-technology items subject to strict controls and less-sensitive items that might be exported with greater ease.

● **PEOPLE**

**Access denied:** Ken Cuccinelli, the attorney general of Virginia, has pledged to continue investigating climate scientist Michael Mann, after a judge threw out two requests for documents related to Mann's work. Mann's former employer, the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, says future demands will have to be "substantially narrower" in scope.

**Fraud finding:** The editor-in-chief of the journal *Cognition* has questioned data published

**THE WEEK  
AHEAD**

**6-9 SEPTEMBER**  
**Oslo hosts the Kavli Prize Week. This year, in addition to the awards ceremony, the programme includes a forum on the role of international cooperation in science. The keynote speakers include John Holdren, US President Barack Obama's chief science adviser.**

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

**7-11 SEPTEMBER**  
**The effects of oil spills, pollutants and climate change on birds will be discussed as part of the 1st World Seabird Conference in Victoria, Canada.**

▶ [worldseabirdconference.com](http://worldseabirdconference.com)

**7-11 SEPTEMBER**  
**The Fourth International Symposium on Biomolecular Archaeology will be held in Copenhagen. Topics include proteomics, ancient DNA and isotope analysis.**

▶ [www.isba4.net](http://www.isba4.net)

in the journal in 2002 by evolutionary psychologist Marc Hauser of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Gerry Altmann, a psycholinguist at the University of York, UK, says that an internal investigation by Harvard, which found Hauser solely responsible for eight instances of scientific misconduct, could not find the raw data to back up some claims made in the paper.

**BUSINESS WATCH**

Mining giant BHP Billiton, headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, sent investors into a trading frenzy after it made a US\$39-billion cash offer to shareholders of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan (PotashCorp) on 20 August.

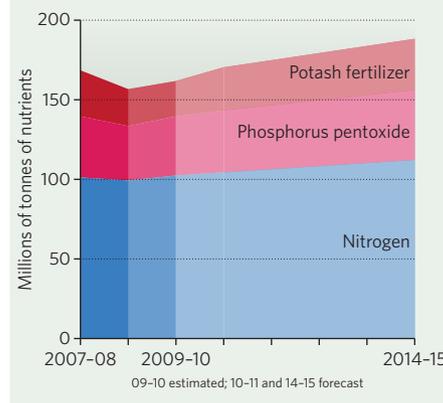
BHP's bid to buy the fertilizer company, based in Saskatoon, Canada, signifies a branching out from its core mining businesses of iron ore, copper and petroleum. The move is being driven by an anticipated growth in demand for — and profits from — phosphates, nitrogen and potash. The Paris-based International Fertilizer Industry Association predicted at its 31 May–2 June annual conference that there would be a 16% increase in fertilizer consumption by the end

of 2015, bouncing back from the effect of the global economic downturn (see chart).

"Profits in the fertilizer industry were not very lucrative 20–30 years ago, and large oil companies and mining companies sold off many of their assets," says Steven Van Kauwenbergh, principal scientist at the IFDC, a non-profit fertilizer and agriculture research organization in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. "But now returns are increasing."

BHP has given PotashCorp shareholders until 19 October to consider the offer, but it is expected to have to raise its bid to succeed. It is thought that China's state-owned chemical company, Sinochem, could also make a bid.

FERTILIZER USE ON THE RISE



SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL FERTILIZER INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION