

# NEWS BRIEFING

## ● POLICY

### Deforestation down:

Preliminary satellite data from Brazil's National Institute for Space Research in São José dos Campos indicate that the rate of deforestation in the country has dropped by 47.5%, from 4,375 square kilometres for August 2008–July 2009 to 2,296 square kilometres for August 2009–July 2010. At this rate, Brazil is set to meet its commitment to reduce deforestation by 80% by 2020 about a decade early. That corresponds to a reduction of roughly 1 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions — equivalent to about 17% of annual US greenhouse-gas emissions.

**Australian elections:** Nearly three weeks after Australia's national elections failed to produce a clear winner, the incumbent prime minister, Julia Gillard, said on 7 September that she had secured enough backing from other parliamentarians to form a minority government. Gillard's power-sharing negotiations have pushed climate change back up the political agenda: to win the support of the newly resurgent Green party, she had to sign up to a cross-party committee on climate change. The deal may increase support for setting a price on carbon emissions. A market-based carbon-trading scheme has been twice rejected by parliament and will not be reconsidered by Gillard until 2012; the Green party favours a straight tax.

**Hypoxia high:** The proportion of oxygen-starved areas of US coastal waters has increased nearly 30-fold since 1960, finds the Interagency Working Group on Harmful Algal Blooms, Hypoxia, and Human Health. Incidents of hypoxia — in which oxygen levels are so low that fish and other animals die — were detected in almost half of the 647 waterways assessed, including the Gulf of Mexico. The report, published on 3 September, states that efforts to stop these dead



P. NASKRECKI

## AFRICA'S FRESHWATER SPECIES IN CRISIS

More than 20% of species in African lakes and watercourses are under threat of extinction, according to a recent assessment of 5,167 plants and animals by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Farming, deforestation, water extraction and dam building are driving habitat loss. Pollution and invasive species are also a problem. Many of the threatened animals, such as the Common Creek Crab (*Liberonautes latidactylus*; pictured), are overfished. The five-year study was prompted by the paucity of information on the conservation status of freshwater species in Africa, but the IUCN says that there are still gaps in surveying, particularly in northern and western Africa.

zones occurring have “not made significant headway”, and calls for the establishment of programmes to monitor and manage water quality in more areas.

**Nuclear reprieve:** Germany's coalition government has agreed to extend the operating licences of the country's 17 nuclear reactors by an average of 12 years. The deal, struck late on 5 September, could also bring in €30 billion (US\$39 billion) in taxes and levies from nuclear-power utilities, which would be invested in renewable-energy research and development before nuclear power is fully phased out during the 2030s. The previous government had intended to phase out the use of nuclear power by 2022.

**Stem-cell funds fight:** Plaintiffs behind a recent court injunction that has frozen US government funding for human embryonic stem-cell research have blasted

a Department of Justice motion that would restore funding until the case goes to trial. The US government filed the appeal on 31 August, along with a request to stay the injunction. A bill that would enshrine the government's right to fund such research into law may be discussed as early as next week, when Congress reconvenes. See also page 138.

**Visa slide:** Applications for Australian student visas have dropped by 11.5% in the 2009–10 academic year, according to the nation's Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The drop mirrors a decline in the total number of foreign students studying in Australia, which has fallen by roughly 16%, to about 270,000. The National Tertiary Education Union, the country's main union for academic staff, based in Melbourne, says that tightened immigration rules and campus attacks on foreign students have led to the declines.

## SOUND BITES

### “It's not another Deepwater Horizon.”

US interior secretary Ken Salazar allays fears of another big spill after a fire on an oil and natural-gas production platform in the Gulf of Mexico on 2 September.

Source: Los Angeles Times Greenspace blog; [go.nature.com/d7MFH1](http://go.nature.com/d7MFH1)

● **BUSINESS**

**Rare focus:** Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, headquartered in New York, has agreed to buy FoldRx, a biotech company based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for an undisclosed sum. FoldRx's lead drug candidate, tafamidis meglumine, is designed to treat transthyretin amyloid polyneuropathy, a rare inherited disease that leads to the build-up of misfolded protein deposits in nerves. The move comes less than three months after Pfizer set up a rare-disease research unit, also in Cambridge. Separately last week, Pfizer abandoned a deal made with Celldex Therapeutics based in Needham, Massachusetts, to fund the development a brain-cancer vaccine.

● **RESEARCH**

**Go GOCE:** The European Space Agency's Gravity field and steady-state Ocean Circulation Experiment (GOCE), knocked out by a software glitch on 18 July, has resumed transmitting data to the ground. The satellite could become fully operational again as early as next week, according to Reiner Rummel, chair of the GOCE mission advisory group.

**Vulture haven:** The numbers of three endangered Asian vulture species — white-rumped (*Gyps bengalensis*), slender-billed (*Gyps tenuirostris*) and red-headed (*Sarcogyps calvus*) — are now either stable or on the increase in Cambodia, according to an annual census by the Cambodia Vulture Conservation Project. Elsewhere on the continent,

**NEWS  
MAKER**



James Enstrom

**The controversial epidemiologist's appointment has not been renewed by the University of California, Los Angeles. His work questions the link between soot particles and deaths in California — findings he says are being ignored by regulators.**

many vulture populations have fallen by more than 95% since the mid-1990s owing to ingestion of toxic levels of diclofenac, a veterinary cattle drug present in their carcasses. But the drug is rarely used in Cambodia. See [go.nature.com/pQLQaI](http://go.nature.com/pQLQaI) for more.

**Higgs hope:** A physics advisory committee has recommended that the Tevatron, a particle accelerator at the Fermi National

Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois, should continue operating until 2014 at a cost of around US\$150 million, rather than cease operation in 2011 as planned. An extended run would give the Tevatron a chance to find evidence of the elusive Higgs boson, according to the committee's report. See [go.nature.com/YGL4Tr](http://go.nature.com/YGL4Tr) for more.

● **PEOPLE**

**Ghostbuster departs:** After a decade running the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), Catherine DeAngelis will step down as editor-in-chief in June 2011. She will head to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, to establish a centre for professional medical ethics. During her tenure, JAMA adopted a tough stance on publication of pharmaceutical industry-funded research, prohibiting ghostwriting and requiring the clinical trials it publishes to be publicly registered. The journal has also called for independent statistical analysis of pharma-sponsored research.

● **EVENTS**

**New Zealand shaken:** A magnitude-7.0 earthquake hit New Zealand's South Island on 3 September, causing widespread damage to Christchurch, the country's second largest city. There have been no reports of fatalities. The tremor's epicentre was about 50 kilometres west of Christchurch, and about 90 kilometres from two active faults, the Alpine fault and the Hope fault.

**THE WEEK  
AHEAD**

**12-15 SEPTEMBER**

**Two powerhouses of medical research, the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and the Wellcome Trust, are hosting their fourth conference on Infectious Disease Genomics and Global Health, which takes place in Hinxtton, UK.**  
[go.nature.com/jzJtuJ](http://go.nature.com/jzJtuJ)

**12-16 SEPTEMBER**

**The World Energy Congress in Montreal, Canada, discusses how to meet the world's future energy demands.**  
[wecmontreal2010.ca](http://wecmontreal2010.ca)

**12-15 SEPTEMBER**

**Agadir, Morocco, hosts the 3rd International Conference on Advanced Nano Materials, which includes sessions on biomaterials and energy.**  
<http://anm2010.nanoac.org>

● **AWARDS**

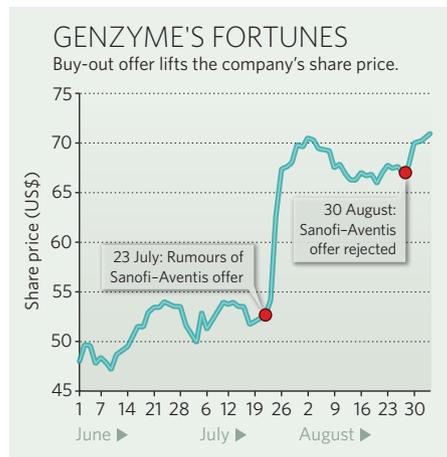
**Million-franc awards:** Shinya Yamanaka of the Institute for Integrated Cell-Material Sciences in Kyoto, Japan, has claimed one of this year's Balzan Prizes for his work reprogramming adult cells to show the characteristics of embryonic stem cells. He will receive one million Swiss francs (US\$989,000), half of which must go to research projects. The other science prize went to Jacob Palis of the Institute of Pure and Applied Mathematics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for his work on dynamical systems.

**BUSINESS WATCH**

The fraught romance between drug makers Sanofi-Aventis and Genzyme — a courtship that has had the world of biotechnology on the edge of its seat — came closer to turning hostile last week when Paris-based Sanofi ended a month of closed-door negotiations and on 29 August publicly announced its intention to buy Genzyme, of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The move was intended to appeal to Genzyme's shareholders, who have enjoyed a nearly 30% hike in the company's stock price since news of Sanofi's advances broke in late July.

At that time, Genzyme's stock was hovering around US\$54 a share, driven low by manufacturing problems that have restricted

supplies of two of the company's top drugs and may not be corrected for up to four years. Sanofi has offered \$69 a share, for a total of \$18.5 billion: a premium that was rejected by Genzyme's board of directors on 30 August. The board called the proposal "opportunistic" and argued that the price failed to consider Genzyme's value once manufacturing woes have been addressed and further drugs come onto the market. But Christopher Viehbacher, head of Sanofi, said that Genzyme was "stonewalling", and that its management had "a history of over promising and under delivery". He has suggested that if negotiations continue to stall, Sanofi may attempt a hostile takeover.



SOURCE: NASDAQ