

POLICY

Genetics advice

An influential panel that advised the US government on health and genetics had its final meeting on 6 October in Bethesda, Maryland. The Secretary's Advisory Committee on Genetics, Health, and Society was created in 2003 to address issues such as genetic discrimination, gene patenting and genetic testing. The panel had "fulfilled its charge" and other government bodies would carry its mantle, said John Burklow, a spokesman for the National Institutes of Health, its parent agency. But current and former committee members were puzzled by last month's decision to dissolve the panel. See go.nature.com/miz9gy for more.

Oil-spill response

A White House-appointed commission investigating the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico released its draft reports on 6 October. It criticized the US federal government for being ill-prepared to use large volumes of dispersants, and for taking too long to embrace estimates of the rate of flow from the leaking well that were higher than the official federal line. Jane Lubchenco, administrator of the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration, responded that low early flow-rate estimates did not affect the federal response. The commission's final report is scheduled to be released in January 2011.

Climate deadlock

The last formal round of talks before this year's climate summit in Cancún, Mexico, produced little progress towards any international climate deal. The meeting in Tianjin, China, was marked



D. BANDIC/AP

Toxic sludge leaves lasting legacy

Scientists assessing the 4 October toxic spill from a Hungarian aluminium oxide factory say recovery could take years. "All life is dead," says János Szépvölgyi, director of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Materials and Environmental Chemistry in Budapest. "A 2–5-centimetre-thick layer of caustic mud is covering the soil." Up to 1 million cubic metres of

alkaline sludge have contaminated thousands of hectares of land north of Lake Balaton. The red colour is from iron oxide, but scientists are more worried about dissolved heavy metals, such as arsenic and chromium, entering groundwater. As *Nature* went to press, eight people were reported to have died, and a second spill was feared. See go.nature.com/a7rm8x for more.

by disagreements between the world's largest polluters, China and the United States, over pledging and verifying emissions cuts. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change conference in Cancún starts on 29 November.

Scientist sacked

Israel's minister of education, Gideon Sa'ar, fired his chief scientist, Gavriel Avital, on 4 October. It was not a surprise: Avital has taken vocal stands against evolution and climate change since he was appointed in December 2009. An aeronautical engineer and a politician, Avital is reported to have said that Israel's science

textbooks should offer pupils alternatives to evolution, and has published articles claiming that there is no connection between human activity and climate change.

Innovation mapped

European research commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn published the European Commission's long-awaited proposal for boosting innovation on 6 October. Part of the European Union's economic strategy plan ('Europe 2020'), the proposal, dubbed Innovation Union, wraps together familiar aims — such as increasing research and development expenditure and

improving mobility between Europe's 27 member states — with a list of steps for removing bottlenecks that prevent ideas from reaching the market. The European Council and Parliament will discuss the proposal over the next weeks.

Fisheries fight

The process of attaining the Marine Stewardship Council's (MSC's) 'sustainable' certification for a fishery (see *Nature* 467, 28–29; 2010) took a novel turn this week in the case of the Antarctic toothfish. After protests from some scientists (see *Nature* 467, 15; 2010), on 11 October an independent adjudicator for the London-based MSC asked

Moody Marine — the company assessing the toothfish — to amend several of the scores in its sustainability assessment. No case has reached this stage before. Opponents of the listing could still lose their fight: revised scores may be sufficient to declare the fishery sustainable.

RESEARCH

Big Bang probe end

Nine years after launch, a spacecraft that measured the faint afterglow of the Big Bang to unprecedented accuracy has ceased operations. On 6 October, researchers at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, announced that the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP) had officially ended its mission. The probe was disposed of by sending it into orbit around the Sun on 8 September. See page 752 for more.

Regulatory science

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has developed a US\$25-million-a-year programme to modernize the science behind its safety evaluations, the agency's head, Margaret Hamburg, announced on 6 October. The Advancing Regulatory Science initiative will update methods for tracking bacteria in the food supply, develop computer

models for toxicology testing and improve laboratory assays to ease development of generic drugs, among other projects. The move follows a 2007 report by an FDA advisory board that said the agency was unable to fulfil its mission because its scientific base had eroded.

Asteroid dust hope

The Hayabusa space explorer might have picked up dust at the Itokawa asteroid, from which it returned in June 2010 after a seven-year mission. Researchers at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said on 6 October that they had scraped 100 or so micrometre-sized grains from an inner container in Hayabusa's recovery capsule. The quantity of particles is encouraging, but there is no evidence yet to conclude that they are from the asteroid. Definitive tests will take several months.

FUNDING

Neglected diseases

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria raised only US\$11.7 billion for 2011–13, after a meeting of its donor countries in New York City on 4–5 October. The fund, based in Geneva, Switzerland, had hoped for \$20 billion. See page 767 for more.

**UK protest rally**

Several hundred scientists gathered in London on 9 October to protest against upcoming cuts to government science and engineering funding (pictured). The rally organizers — pressure groups Science is Vital and the Campaign for Science and Engineering — reiterated messages that cutting science funding would harm the economy and drive British scientists abroad.

BUSINESS

Super cool deal

The world's largest order for superconducting wire was announced on 6 October. American Superconductor, based in Devens, Massachusetts, said it had received an order for 3 million metres of wire from South Korean company LS Cable, headquartered in Anyang-Si near Seoul. LS Cable will

COMING UP

14 OCTOBER

NASA hosts a symposium in Arlington, Virginia, to celebrate 50 years since the agency started an exobiology programme. go.nature.com/yfdlud

18–19 OCTOBER

Leading lights of stem-cell biology gather at the Royal Society in London to discuss future prospects for the field. go.nature.com/lawddu

18–29 OCTOBER

A summit in Nagoya, Japan, discusses how to preserve the world's biodiversity. go.nature.com/v2kgi7 and see page 764 for more.

20 OCTOBER

The extent of the UK government's cuts to funding for science and education will be revealed when it publishes its three-year spending plan.

use the wire — the cost of which was not disclosed — to make superconducting cables, initially for South Korea's electricity network. The wire is made using yttrium barium copper oxide (YBCO); discovered in 1987, this ceramic compound superconducts at temperatures up to 93 kelvin (–180°C), so can be cooled with liquid nitrogen. See go.nature.com/bok2qw for more.

AWARDS

Chemistry Nobel

Richard Heck, Ei-ichi Negishi and Akira Suzuki were awarded the 2010 Nobel Prize in Chemistry on 6 October, for their development of reactions to connect carbon-chain molecules using palladium catalysts. See page 765 for more.

TREND WATCH

About 12 million animals were used in science in the European Union during 2008, say statistics published last week — roughly the same as in 2005. The fraction of animals used in fundamental biology research has risen by 5% since 2005, because of greater use of transgenic mice. Alternative ways of measuring toxicity slightly cut the number of rats and rabbits used in chemical-safety tests, but 54,000 more mice were needed to test batches of the wrinkle-reducing botulinum toxin than in 2005. See go.nature.com/uunifg for more.

EUROPE'S USE OF RESEARCH ANIMALS

In 2008, fundamental biology studies accounted for the largest single proportion of animal experiments in the European Union.

