

POLICY

Scientific integrity

The White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) is in court over its failure to put forward recommendations to ensure scientific integrity in government. Scientists are still waiting, 18 months after President Barack Obama gave the OSTP 90 days to deliver agency guidelines for putting science at the centre of policy-making. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, an advocacy group based in Washington DC, wants to know why. It started legal action against the OSTP on 19 October when the agency didn't respond to its freedom of information request for draft recommendations. See go.nature.com/aec5zz for more.

Misconduct report

A panel commissioned by the Canadian government has recommended that the nation revise its system for curbing research misconduct. A 21 October report by the Council of Canadian Academies — a non-profit organization based in Ottawa — says that a council of research integrity should be created to help educate researchers about good practice and to provide confidential advice. Privacy laws hampering the identification of individuals or institutions found guilty of research misconduct should also be relaxed, the report says. See go.nature.com/ISyJDi for more.

Science-prize row

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) last week found a way to avoid awarding a controversial science prize sponsored by an African dictator, whose regime is



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Conservation's rare successes

Fifty-two species of vertebrates move a category closer to extinction every year, according to an analysis of more than 25,000 mammals, birds and amphibians published on 26 October (M. Hoffman *et al. Science* doi:10.1126/science.1194442; 2010), as the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity meet in Nagoya, Japan. But falling biodiversity has been slowed by conservation efforts, such as those that repopulated parts of North America with

the still-endangered black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*, pictured). Using an index of extinction risk based on category movements in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, Michael Hoffman at the IUCN in Cambridge, UK, and his colleagues found that biodiversity declines would have been at least one-fifth worse without any efforts to halt habitat loss, curb hunting and tackle invasive species. The last was the most effective strategy, they said.

widely viewed as corrupt and oppressive. The Paris-based organization is not explicitly rejecting the life-sciences prize, funded by a US\$3-million donation from President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea. Instead, the UNESCO executive board agreed to suspend awarding the money "until a consensus is reached" — a diplomatic way of putting the prize on hold, as it seems unlikely that delegate nations will ever agree. See go.nature.com/Nbi9nQ for more.

FUNDING

UK funding

British scientists were jubilant at escaping the worst of government cuts announced on 20 October.

The science budget was frozen at £4.6 billion (US\$7.2 billion) annually for four years — although other government departments saw spending drop by an average of 19%. See page 1017 for more.

Stem-cell funding

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) announced awards on 21 October worth US\$72 million to fund 19 stem-cell researchers in the state, as well as to recruit another. Last year, the agency funded 14 researchers with \$230 million; the grants are aimed at moving experimental treatments into the clinic. Funded by a \$3-billion bond in 2004, CIRM has \$1.6 billion remaining in its coffers. Meanwhile, a US Court of Appeals will hear arguments

in a lawsuit next month challenging the National Institutes of Health's ability to fund human embryonic stem-cell research. See nature.com/stemcellfunding and page 1031 for more.

EVENTS

Cholera in Haiti

More than 250 people have died from the cholera outbreak in earthquake-ravaged Haiti, the United Nations said on 25 October. Some 3,000 people have contracted the disease, which spreads through contaminated water and food. Although cholera claims thousands of lives in African countries every year, it is Haiti's first outbreak in a century. As *Nature* went to press, aid workers hoped

REUTERS

that the outbreak could be prevented from spreading in the capital Port-au-Prince. For more analysis of the Haiti earthquake, see page 1018.

RESEARCH

Volcano drilling

A project to drill a borehole into an active volcano near Naples, Italy, has been halted awaiting further safety data. Researchers at Italy's National Institute for Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV) in Naples had planned to drill 4,000 metres into the Campi Flegrei volcano to learn what signs might precede an eruption. But some Italian scientists voiced concerns about health and environmental risks (see go.nature.com/eH4FEV). On 18 October, the mayor of Naples, Rosa Russo Iervolino, said she had asked the Italian civil-protection department for a safety report, which is likely to take a few weeks. INGV scientists say the project is safe.

BUSINESS

Rare earth alarm

A simmering trade dispute over rare earth elements intensified last week, as Japan urged China to resume exporting the minerals; it says shipments have been blocked since September, although Beijing denies an official



export ban. Meanwhile, share prices of rare-earth mining companies continue to rocket, and US congressman Ed Markey (Democrat, Massachusetts) has asked the US government to look into reports of additional Chinese export curbs. Miners in China (pictured) produce more than 90% of the world's rare earth elements, which are used as catalysts and in high-tech magnets, car batteries, wind turbines and mobile phones.

Obesity drugs

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) maintained its cautious approach to weight-loss drugs on 23 October, by rejecting the obesity pill lorcaserin, made by Arena Pharmaceuticals in San Diego, California. The agency has not approved a new obesity drug for more than a decade, and cited concerns about the drug's efficacy and side effects. The FDA's decision on another diet pill, Qnexa, developed by Vivus of Mountain View, California, is due on 28 October; an

advisory panel voted against it in July. A third, Contrave, made by Orexigen in La Jolla, California, is up for FDA approval in December.

Avandia subpoena

In its third-quarter earnings report released on 21 October, drug giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) revealed that it is being subpoenaed by the US Department of Justice over the company's development and marketing practices for the diabetes drug Avandia (rosiglitazone). The company, headquartered in London, came under fire in July when a US Senate committee concluded that GSK had known about the drug's heart risks for more than a decade without reporting them to regulators. GSK denied the charge. Sales of Avandia are currently restricted in the United States and banned in Europe.

PEOPLE

Conflict of interest

Diána Bánáti, re-elected last week as chair of the management board of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), has resigned from the European board of directors of the International Life Sciences Institute, a non-governmental organization funded by food companies that seeks to coordinate and fund

COMING UP

31 OCT–3 NOV

Expect more updates on the fate of leaked oil in the Gulf of Mexico, as the Geological Society of America meets in Denver, Colorado. go.nature.com/decw8q

2 NOVEMBER

America's midterm elections: a transformed Congress could shake up science-related policy, from health-care reform to climate change (for issues at stake, see nature.com/midterm2010).

2–6 NOVEMBER

The effects of epigenetics on psychiatric illnesses are among topics up for discussion at the annual meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics in Washington DC. go.nature.com/ndpoi3

research and risk assessment. Her stepping down comes after controversy over alleged potential conflicts of interest (see *Nature* **467**, 647; 2010). The move was noted in an EFSA statement on 21 October.

Activists sentenced

Five British activists who tried to close down animal-testing firm Huntingdon Life Sciences near Cambridge, UK, by harassing and threatening anyone who did business with the company, were sentenced to between 15 months and 6 years in prison on 25 October. A sixth activist received a one-year suspended sentence. Seven other members of the same group, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, were sentenced in January 2009.

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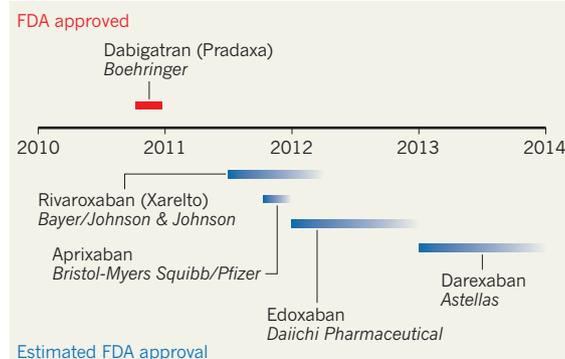
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BUSINESS WATCH

Drug firms are racing to replace warfarin, a blood thinner in use since the 1950s. Many patients can't tolerate the drug, and its use requires regular blood tests. On 19 October, German firm Boehringer Ingelheim gained the US Food and Drug Administration's go-ahead to sell its drug dabigatran to some patients taking warfarin to prevent stroke. Other drug firms are not far behind (see chart). "It could be a very tightly fought battle," says Jonathan Angell, a market analyst at Datamonitor in London.

BLOOD-THINNING COMPETITION

Several firms hope to gain US approval for replacements to warfarin. Its market is worth some \$400 million, but new drugs could earn billions of dollars, as they are costlier and applicable to more patients.



SOURCE: DATAMONITOR