

POLICY

Embryo bans lifted

On 16 July, the French National Assembly approved legislation to permit research on human embryonic stem cells and embryos. The decision, which fulfils a 2012 campaign pledge by President François Hollande, was backed largely by the socialist majority and opposed by conservatives. Such research was previously banned, with some exceptions for work promising “major therapeutic progress” for serious diseases (see *Nature* **469**, 277; 2011). Although the ban has now been lifted, research will be strictly regulated by the French Biomedicine Agency.

Carbon tax scrapped

Australia will shift from a carbon tax to an emissions trading system for greenhouse gases one year ahead of schedule, announced Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 16 July. The government said that it was abandoning the controversial tax, which took effect last year, to reduce costs for consumers (see go.nature.com/9afdee). The move is expected to lower the price of carbon from about US\$23 a tonne to around \$6 a tonne beginning in July 2014, and should save an average family some \$350 per year.

Regulators saved

UK agencies that regulate human-embryo and human-tissue research have been spared the axe. After initially planning to dissolve the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority and the Human Tissue Authority, the government suggested earlier this year that the two bodies could be merged. But it has now accepted the recommendations of an independent review released



Tar drip drops

After 69 years of waiting, scientists in Ireland captured the first video footage of a tar-pitch droplet's plop earlier this month. The experiment, started in 1944 at Trinity College Dublin, demonstrates the fluid nature of tar, or asphalt, which appears to be solid at room temperature. Physicists are eager to study the details of a droplet's escape for the first time. Although an identical experiment has been going on in Queensland, Australia, since 1927, cameras missed its most recent drip in 2000. The next plunge of an Australian drop is expected by the end of 2013. See go.nature.com/wbngyw for more.

on 17 July, which found that there is little overlap between the work of the agencies and that they should remain separate entities. See go.nature.com/f7nt6k for more.

EPA delay ends

The US Senate voted on 18 July, after a 133-day delay, to confirm Gina McCarthy as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The wait is the

longest faced by any chief in the EPA's 43-year history (see *Nature* **497**, 418–419; 2013). Senate Republicans had used procedural tactics to delay formal votes on McCarthy and on several other nominees proposed by President Barack Obama's administration to head federal agencies. They relented when Democrats threatened to change Senate rules. At the EPA, McCarthy will oversee regulations

to limit greenhouse-gas emissions and to improve water and air quality.

Marine-reserve veto

Proposals to create two huge marine reserves in Antarctic waters were blocked by Russia on 16 July at an international meeting in Bremerhaven, Germany. Plans put before the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), which oversees fishing activity in Antarctica, would have banned fishing in 1.6 million square kilometres of the Ross Sea and created seven protected areas off the coast of East Antarctica. Despite the failure to reach agreement, CCAMLR members are expected to continue discussing the plans in Hobart, Australia, in October. See go.nature.com/usayrh for more.

EU pesticide ban

The European Union (EU) is set to ban the insecticide fipronil from use in agricultural fields, owing to concerns that the chemical is contributing to the drastic decline in Europe's bee population. On 16 July, 23 member states supported the restriction, with 2 opposing and 3 abstaining. From next year, fipronil use will be mainly limited to seeds sown exclusively in greenhouses. The European Food Safety Authority in Parma, Italy, concluded in May that maize (corn) seeds treated with fipronil pose a “high acute risk” to honeybees.

iPS trial approved

On 19 July, Japan's health minister, Norihisa Tamura, approved the world's first trial in humans of induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells. Masayo Takahashi, a stem-cell biologist at the RIKEN Center for Developmental

DAVID WHYTE

Biology in Kobe, plans to use sheets of retinal cells derived from iPS cells to repair retinal epithelium in patients with age-related macular degeneration, a common cause of blindness. Final approval by Takahashi's institution is expected soon, and she plans to start recruiting patients as early as September.

EVENTS

China tremors

Two earthquakes rocked an area near the city of Dingxi in Gansu province, northwest China, on 21 July. The tremors — one at magnitude 5.9, followed by one at magnitude 5.6 — struck a region that has seen three quakes greater than magnitude 6 in the past four decades. News services reported at least 89 deaths, along with major structural damage to buildings. The relatively shallow depth of both quakes — about 10 kilometres — may have contributed to the damage.

PEOPLE

Turing pardon

Four years after issuing a formal apology, the UK government has cleared the way to grant a posthumous pardon to the British mathematician Alan Turing (pictured), who in 1952 was convicted of 'gross indecency'



under anti-homosexuality legislation (see *Nature* 482, 441; 2012). He later took his own life. On 19 July, the government offered its support for a bill that would overturn the conviction. Turing is regarded as a hero of the Second World War for helping to break the German Enigma code. His 'Turing machine' concept is considered to underlie modern computer science.

RESEARCH

Cosmic gas guzzler

An immense gas cloud several times the mass of Earth has started its death spiral around the supermassive black hole at the heart of the Milky Way. Observations from the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope in Chile, revealed on 17 July, show the cloud swinging and stretching around the black hole. Extreme gravitational forces

are expected to rip apart the cloud, called G2, in the coming months. See go.nature.com/3kpqzj for more.

India trials halted

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, last week confirmed reports that it has postponed some of its roughly 30 clinical trials in India, and has stopped enrolling participants in others. In January, the Indian health ministry tightened regulations on clinical trials. Sponsors are now required to provide compensation to participants who are injured as a result of a trial, or to the surviving relatives of those who are killed. "NIH has expressed its concerns about the new regulations, and looks forward to hearing clarifications from the Indian government," the agency told *Nature*.

BUSINESS

Pharma probe

The Chinese government is investigating four senior executives of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) in China for allegedly bribing officials and physicians to boost GSK drug sales, funnelling the money through travel agencies. The executives are suspected of giving 3 billion renminbi (US\$489 million) in bribes since 2007, Chinese officials said last week. The government

COMING UP

28 JULY–1 AUGUST

Scientists discuss conflicts between humans and wildlife at the 50th annual conference of the Animal Behavior Society in Boulder, Colorado. go.nature.com/qjdgeh

29 JULY–6 AUGUST

The American Physical Society will discuss plans for high-energy physics at a meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota (see page 391). go.nature.com/7yiv5p

29 JULY–2 AUGUST

The meteor that exploded over Russia in February is on the agenda at the Meteoritical Society's annual meeting in Edmonton, Canada. go.nature.com/gtbqqv

says that the probe is part of nationwide crackdown to ensure fair competition in the pharmaceutical industry. GSK, headquartered in London, says that it is conducting its own review and is cooperating with the Chinese police.

GM crops dropped

Agricultural biotechnology giant Monsanto has abandoned efforts to win regulatory approval for the cultivation of new genetically modified (GM) crops in the European Union (EU). The company confirmed last week that it is withdrawing all pending EU applications for new transgenic maize (corn), soya beans and sugar beet. The firm, based in St Louis, Missouri, said that it would focus instead on its conventional agriculture business in the EU. See page 387 and go.nature.com/vkaxty for more.

NATURE.COM

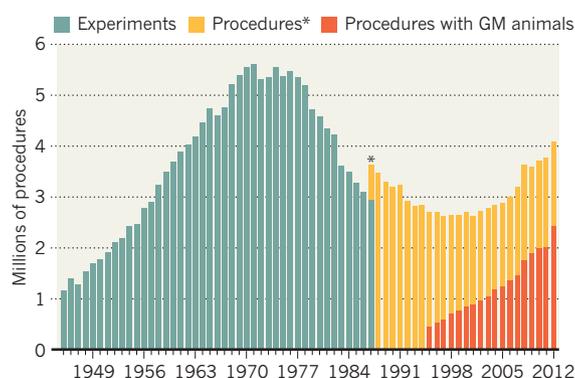
For daily news updates see:
www.nature.com/news

TREND WATCH

The number of research procedures involving animals in the United Kingdom has continued to rise, reaching 4.11 million in 2012, according to Home Office data released last week. The 8% increase over 2011 figures was driven largely by greater use of genetically modified and other mutant animals. Mice accounted for 76% of the 4.03 million animals that were used for the first time last year in procedures including breeding and experiments. See go.nature.com/t9z6uk for more.

UK ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS ON THE RISE

Research procedures involving animals are at a 20-year high, fuelled by increasing use of genetically modified (GM) animals.



*UK switched to recording procedures in 1987. Creating a GM animal and conducting an experiment may be considered separate procedures. No GM data before 1995.