

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## POLICY

### ITER improvements

The nuclear-fusion project ITER has improved its performance and management, and the United States should continue to support it at least until 2018, the US Department of Energy said in a report released on 26 May. ITER is a collaboration between the European Union, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the United States. Its goal is to show that fusing hydrogen nuclei to make helium is a feasible way to produce electricity. The multibillion-euro experiment is under construction in southern France, but the work is more than a decade behind schedule, and its costs have spiralled. See page 16 for more.

### Science for all

Ministers from the European Union's 28 member states have agreed that open access to scientific publications should become the common standard across the bloc by 2020. The EU Competitiveness Council, which met in Brussels on 26–27 May, announced the target following a public debate of broader plans to develop

## NUMBER CRUNCH

# 263,211

The number of extra deaths from cancer during the financial crisis of 2008–10 in countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Countries with universal health-care systems seemed to be protected from this impact, according to a study in *The Lancet*.

Source: M. Maruthappu et al. *Lancet* <http://doi.org/bhzz> (2016)



SIMON DAWSON/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

## Better barley boosts Ethiopian brewing

Two high-yielding varieties of malt barley might help Ethiopian smallholders. The strains can produce yields of up to 6 tonnes per hectare — triple that of the average traditional crop (pictured). They were released on 26 May by the Holetta Agricultural Research Center near Addis Ababa, after decades of

collaboration with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, headquartered in Lebanon. Demand for the crop — for food and for Ethiopia's burgeoning beer industry — is outstripping supply, with shortages in 2015 forcing some breweries to cut production.

'open science.' The aim is to make research and data more freely available to scientists and to the wider society. The meeting's conclusions held few specific details as to how the target might be reached, but prioritize open access on the EU political agenda.

### Chemical reform

The US House of Representatives approved a historic bill on 24 May, strengthening oversight of both new and old chemicals. The bipartisan legislation would overhaul the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act — widely considered ineffective — and expand the US Environmental

Protection Agency's authority to ensure that chemicals are safe. The bill, which comes with endorsements from the White House and industry, and cautious support from many environmental groups, is expected to pass the Senate soon. See pages 5 and 18 for more.

## FUNDING

### French cuts

The French government has backtracked over part of a plan to cut €256 million (US\$285 million) from this year's research and higher-education budget after 8 eminent French scientists called the plan "scientific and

industrial suicide". In response, President François Hollande promised on 30 May to reduce the proposed cuts — 1.1% of the total research and higher education budget — by €134 million. High-profile research agencies — the Alternative and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) and the computer-science institute Inria — will be spared from cuts, he said.

### Telescope record

The European Southern Observatory signed a €400-million (US\$448-million)

contract — the largest ever for a ground-based telescope — on 25 May for construction of the dome and structure of the European Extremely Large Telescope (E-ELT). Building is expected to begin in 2017 on the 3,000-metre-high Cerro Armazones peak in Chile, and should be completed in 2024. With a primary mirror 39 metres in diameter and a footprint the size of a football pitch, the E-ELT will be the largest optical telescope on Earth. Construction for the slightly smaller Thirty Meter Telescope in Hawaii has been stalled by protests by Native Hawaiians.

## PEOPLE

**Iranian physicist**

Omid Kokabee, a laser physicist who has been in an Iranian jail for more than five years for “communicating with a hostile government”, has been bailed on temporary medical leave following surgery for kidney cancer, sources tell *Nature*. The 33-year-old scientist, who had studied at the University of Texas at Austin, left a hospital in Tehran on 25 May after his friends posted bail of 5 billion Iranian rials (US\$165,000). They hope to extend his leave using an article of Iran’s penal code that permits the postponement of a sentence that may harm a prisoner’s health. Kokabee (**pictured**)



was arrested in Iran in 2011, while visiting family, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison for alleged espionage — which he denies. Numerous appeals have been made for his release by scientific and human-rights organizations. See [go.nature.com/xp4vza](http://go.nature.com/xp4vza) for more.

**Fossil schemes**

Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for the forthcoming US presidential elections, promised on 26 May to roll back environmental regulations, promote domestic fossil-fuel production and pull the United States out of the 2015 Paris climate agreement if elected. Speaking in North Dakota, where the oil boom has collapsed owing to low oil prices, Trump accused the administration of President Barack Obama of using “totalitarian tactics” and implementing “draconian climate rules” to halt the use of fossil fuels. A global-warming sceptic, Trump said that his

administration would deal with “real environmental challenges, not phony ones”.

**Next Science editor**

Jeremy Berg will become the editor-in-chief of the Science family of journals, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) announced on 25 May. He will succeed Marcia McNutt when she leaves on 1 July to start her role as president of the US National Academy of Sciences. Berg is currently associate senior vice-chancellor for science strategy and planning in the health sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is a former director of the US National Institute of General Medical Sciences, and will be the 20th holder of the AAAS post.

## RESEARCH

**Phone doubts**

The preliminary findings of a huge animal study are fuelling ambiguity over possible health risks from mobile-phone use. In partial findings uploaded to the bioRxiv preprint website on 27 May, researchers with the US\$25-million US National Toxicology Program (NTP) report that up to 3% of male rats that were exposed to levels of radiation higher than most phone users would experience developed malignant brain and heart tumours (M. Wyde

## COMING UP

**5–9 JUNE**

Astrophysicists and science historians ponder the Science of Time — past, present and future — at a meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts. [go.nature.com/mhsft6](http://go.nature.com/mhsft6)

**6–10 JUNE**

The biennial Conference on Mathematical Geophysics takes place in Paris. The meeting focuses on experimental investigation as well as theoretical and modelling work. [go.nature.com/lwekvs](http://go.nature.com/lwekvs)

*et al.* Preprint at bioRxiv <http://doi.org/bjfm>; 2016). The NTP plans to release data from a similar mouse study in 2017. Whether the final results of the studies may be relevant to humans is unclear. Peer-reviewed studies have previously found no cancer risk associated with mobile-phone use in humans.

## EVENTS

**Space inflation**

Astronauts on the International Space Station successfully tested a flexible orbital habitat on 28 May. The Bigelow Expandable Activity Module, which inflates from 1.7 metres to 4 metres long, is meant to provide an extra 16 cubic metres for living and working in deep space. The module had some initial problems expanding, owing to unexpected friction between layers of its fabric, but was eventually brought to a pressure equal with that of the rest of the space station. The module will remain in orbit for two years, and serve as a test for possible bigger versions in the future.

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## TREND WATCH

A survey of almost 250 biomedical scientists suggests that 80% feel that preprint servers — on which manuscripts are posted before peer review and formal publication — should not be hosted by for-profit organizations. The poll was conducted ahead of a 24 May workshop convened by ASAPbio in Bethesda, Maryland (see [go.nature.com/wtkqls](http://go.nature.com/wtkqls)). The group is coordinating efforts to implement preprint servers for biology, including making plans for their governance.

**PREPRINTS NOT PROFITS**

A survey by ASAPbio suggests that the biology community strongly favours the non-profit model for hosting preprints.

A preprint server should be hosted by a:  
■ For-profit entity ■ Non-profit entity

