

France to collaborate with UK on building new synchrotron

[LONDON] The French government announced on Monday (2 August) that it has agreed to play a major role in financing the construction and operation of a new third-generation synchrotron radiation facility in Britain.

The news has been welcomed by the British government and the Wellcome Trust, which last year agreed to provide £100 million (US\$165 million) towards the cost of the 3-GeV synchrotron machine, known as Diamond (see *Nature* 394, 209; 1998).

But the announcement has provoked an angry reaction in parts of the French research community, which had been lobbying for funds for its own planned 2.15-GeV third-generation synchrotron, Soleil.

This project had been seen by many as a key requirement for meeting France's declared aim of boosting research in the life sciences — particularly in exploiting genome sequence information. It was also regarded as the logical successor to ageing facilities at the Laboratoire de l'Utilisation du Rayonnement Électromagnétique (LURE) at Orsay, close to Paris.

The French announcement comes two years after the abandonment of earlier efforts to persuade British and French scientists and engineers to collaborate on the construction of a single synchrotron. At the time, it was argued that there was sufficient demand for access to synchrotron beams in both countries to justify two separate machines (see *Nature* 387, 539; 1997).

But it also follows a recent series of controversial statements by Claude Allègre, the minister of national education and research. Allègre has drawn the ire of many French researchers with his suggestion that, given the number of European countries now planning synchrotron facilities, there is no a strong case for building yet another machine in France (see *Nature* 395, 831; 1998).

In a statement issued in Paris on Monday, the ministry points out that several research facilities in France are used by researchers throughout Europe. It says the decision to participate in the British synchrotron is part of a broad strategy to promote the emergence of a European scientific community "competitive with the American or Japanese scientific community".

According to the ministry, France estimates that it will pay FF350 million (US\$56 million) towards the construction costs of Diamond over seven years, and FF60 million to FF80 million a year to its operating costs.

The statement adds that French scientists and engineers will be closely involved in the

design and construction of the synchrotron. France and Britain have, with the Wellcome Trust, agreed to set up joint technical committees that will draw up detailed specifications for the project and how it will operate, as well as detailed costings.

France will also set up a special laboratory on the Diamond site aimed, in particular, at welcoming French researchers. But the exact location of Diamond will be decided by Britain alone, and a decision is expected next month. The project is planned as a successor to synchrotron facilities at the Daresbury Laboratory in Cheshire.

The Wellcome Trust says it is "delighted" at the French involvement in Diamond. It says it is keen to ensure that the synchrotron needs of the biomedical research community are met. "The involvement of the French in the design of the facility will help to ensure that this is fulfilled."

A spokeswoman for the UK Department of Trade and Industry said that economies of scale from the collaboration would benefit both countries. "It is an excellent example of a most productive form of European collaboration," said the spokeswoman. "This will be a superb opportunity to build a world class facility, supporting leading-edge research in a wide range of disciplines — not only in the physical sciences but also and

notably in the biological sciences."

Reactions have been more muted — and frequently hostile — in France, where there has been a lengthy political stand-off between Allègre and several French regions, each keen to attract the facility.

Last week, for example, shortly before the government's decision was made public, leading scientists involved in the various bids to host Soleil issued a press statement warning that relying on foreign synchrotron facilities — and Diamond in particular — could be "disastrous for the long-term development of high-level research, fundamental and applied, in France".

The French government says that the continued operation of LURE is not under threat. But in June, François Wuilleumier, who headed the campaign to locate Soleil in the Paris region, issued a statement saying that France's participation in Diamond would only meet 15 to 20 per cent of the needs of French researchers.

Wuilleumier, a director of research at the Laboratory of Atomic and Ionic Spectroscopy of the National Centre for Scientific Research, said that not building Soleil would be a "fatal blow". The harmful consequences would end a scientific adventure "in a field in which France has been among the pioneers for the past 30 years". **David Dickson & Natasha Loder**

Wallace rescued from a grave injustice

[LONDON] A group has been set up to raise funds to restore the neglected grave (right) of Alfred Russel Wallace, who discovered evolution by natural selection independently of Charles Darwin.

Darwin was buried in Westminster Abbey in London, alongside royalty and figures such as Isaac Newton, and is remembered as one of the world's greatest scientists. Wallace, in contrast, has been almost forgotten by history, although some believe the question of the priority of the discovery remains open.

Wallace's grave has been neglected for many years in a cemetery in Broadstone, Dorset. A striking feature of the grave is a seven-foot fossilized conifer trunk, whose significance is unknown, but which is now in need of attention.

George Beccaloni, a researcher at the Natural History Museum in London, located the grave after a search last year. "I was quite horrified by its poor condition," he says. Along with Wallace's grandson Richard Russel Wallace, Beccaloni has launched a



memorial fund to restore and protect the monument.

They hope to gain legal protection for the grave and to extend its lease and transfer it to the Linnean Society. They also want to secure a plaque for Wallace's house, "The Dell", in Essex, where he lived from 1871 to 1876 and wrote *The Geographical Distribution of Animals*. **Natasha Loder**