

Oceanographers' lobby

Washington

To help convince Congress that oceanographers should play an important role in plans to address the issue of global change (see page 3), representatives from some four dozen oceanographic institutions met last week in Washington to form the Council on Ocean Affairs.

Jim Baker, president of the Joint Oceanographic Institutions, which has sponsored the new council, says that while federal agencies such as the NOAA and NASA are knowledgeable about the needs of oceanographers, Congress needs independently to be educated about the issues important to them.

While the council is intended to represent institutions, the new Oceanography Society, also promoted by Baker, is a professional society for oceanographers. The society will hold its first annual meeting this summer in Monterey, California. J.P.

Staab steps down

Munich

HEINZ Staab, president of West Germany's Max Planck Society (MPS), has announced that he will resign when his six-year term ends in the summer of 1990. A newly formed selection committee will present a list of potential replacements to the MPS senate in November.

Staab, 62, who is also a director of the Max Planck Institute for Medical Research at Heidelberg, would have been eligible for one more term. He is stepping down to devote himself to research. S.D.

Melbourne rivalled

Sydney

SYDNEY may be about to take a step to right the balance between itself and Melbourne, traditionally the centre of Australian medical research.

Professor Tony Basten has been appointed director of the new Centenary Institute of Cancer Studies and Cell Biology, a joint venture between the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and the University of Sydney. The new institute will incorporate the Clinical Immunology Research Centre at the University of Sydney and is due to move a staff of 150 to two floors of a new six-storey building by October 1990.

The institute will be supported by state and federal grants, a block grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council and money from the private sector. T.E.

Genentech's heart drug

Washington

THE US Food and Drug Administration ruled on Monday of this week that Genentech can claim in its advertising that TPA (tissue plasminogen activator) reduces the death rate among patients experiencing a heart attack, based on new data from two ongoing clinical trials comparing several heart drugs. Previously, the agency would only allow that TPA treatment dissolves the blood clots causing the heart attack. C.E.

Freeze hits BMFT research

Munich

BATTLE lines have been drawn for the fight for next year's budget for the West German Research and Technology Ministry (BMFT), with European space projects, microelectronics and other politically sensitive items hanging in the balance. The federal research minister, Heinz Riesenhuber (Christian Democrat or CDU), has even come under attack from his own party as well as the opposition for not fighting harder for an increase in his stagnating budget.

BMFT is responsible for the general promotion, planning and coordination of research in West Germany. It supports technological research and development, data processing, nuclear research and technology as well as space and aeronautical research. As well as providing the lion's share of support for the Large Research Establishments (*Grossforschungseinrichtungen*) and the Max Planck Society, BMFT supports basic research at universities in selected areas.

The BMFT budget will decrease in real terms in 1989 for the first time in recent memory, if a budget freeze imposed last November is not lifted. The ministry lost DM190 million of its DM7,600 million budget to a "global reduction" imposed on all ministries. A further DM166 million has been frozen by the finance minister. Coupled with the effects of inflation, these cuts result in a reduction of the overall amount spent by BMFT in 1989, instead of the 2.8 per cent increase announced last year.

Ministry officials are not optimistic that the freeze will be lifted, but are trying to estimate where the axe will fall. A likely candidate for a cut would be the West German contribution to the large projects of the European Space Agency (ESA). But ESA would have to approve any such reductions, the effect of which might be to delay projects such as the space shuttle Hermes or the booster rocket Ariane 5.

The Max Planck Society, 60 per cent of whose funds derive from BMFT, will be largely protected from the cuts, thanks to the efforts of the West German finance minister Gerhard Stoltenberg and the *Länder* (states).

The shape of the 1990 budget will emerge in the next few weeks from discussions between BMFT and the Finance Ministry. The government will present a budget to parliament only in July, after its broad scope has been decided behind closed doors.

Meanwhile, there are signs that the ministry will shake off its lethargy and, even at this stage, ask for a big increase in 1990, partly to make up for the cuts in

1989. A ministry spokesman would not say how big an increase Riesenhuber will seek, except to say that it will be more than the growth of the overall federal budget. Some predict that the minister will ask for an extra 6 per cent.

West German participation in Hermes and the space station Columbus has begun to look even less certain than before in the light of the struggle over the BMFT budget. The consensus in Bonn is that it will probably not matter if a few tens of millions of deutschmarks are delayed until next year. But a much bigger commitment will be necessary in 1991 if Hermes and Columbus are to get off the ground. So far, the money required, eventually amounting to thousands of millions of deutschmarks, has not shown up in the medium-term West German budget.

In a related development, the Bundestag budget committee voted last week to release a previously frozen DM27 million for supersonic transport technology. The money will be invested in developing the proposed West German space plane Sanger, which represents the next generation of space shuttle technology.

Yet West German research and development continues to grow. But figures made public by BMFT show that the rising investment in West German research and development derives primarily from industry. No less than 74 per cent of the

Heinz Riesenhuber (right) is under pressure from his own party and the opposition. Social Democrat member Josef Vosen complains "Riesenhuber has promised a lot, but the money is not [yet] there".



DM61,400 million spent in 1988 was industry money. But a BMFT official says it is "questionable" whether overall research spending will continue to grow as fast as the gross domestic product, given the slow growth in the BMFT budget and the loss in 1990 of tax deductions for some company research.

BMFT notes that the trend elsewhere, in Japan and the United States for example, is just the reverse, with governments spending "disproportionately much" on research. But a BMFT official adds that there has recently been a "storm" of grant applications from university researchers, suggesting that the stiff competition for grants experienced by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) has now hit BMFT as well (see *Nature* 337, 590; 16 February 1989).

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