

## Britain drops initiative to explain science to the public

**London** The plug has finally been pulled on one of Britain's first efforts at helping the public get to grips with science.

On 9 December, the Royal Society, the Royal Institution of Great Britain and the British Association, the three original funding organizations of the science-communication body Copus, announced that they are abandoning the search for a new leader and disbanding its ruling council. The move follows attempts to modernize the organization and the recent angry resignation of its previous chair, Bridget Ogilvie (see *Nature* 417, 577; 2002).

In a joint statement, the three organizations said: "We have reached the conclusion that the top-down approach which Copus currently exemplifies is no longer appropriate to the wider agenda that the science communication community is now addressing."

## Australia opens way to embryonic stem cells

**Sydney** Months of heated debate in the Australian Senate about embryonic stem cells drew to a close on 5 December, when politicians voted to allow researchers access

to surplus human embryos created by *in vitro* fertilization. Researchers will now be able to derive new stem-cell lines from some 70,000 frozen human embryos created before 5 April, the date of a previous government agreement on embryo research. Both therapeutic and reproductive cloning have already been outlawed in a separate bill.

As in other countries, the issue has divided the government. It also attracted plenty of media attention, including a row over whether Alan Trounson, a stem-cell researcher at Monash University in Melbourne, deliberately misled the public when discussing stem-cell research (see *Nature* 419, 4; 2002). The National Health and Medical Research Council will design a regulatory framework and researcher-licensing system to cover the use of embryos.

## Syngenta takes its rice genome institute off the boil

**San Diego** Agribusiness company Syngenta is to close its Torrey Mesa Research Institute (TMRI) in San Diego, California, with the loss of around 80 jobs, including scientists and support staff. TMRI is known for having helped produce a commercial version of the rice genome sequence, which was published alongside a publicly funded version this April (see *Science* 296, 92–100; 2002).



Field work: the rice genome was Torrey Mesa's last success.

About 75 TMRI scientists will move to nearby biotechnology company Diversa, which has signed a seven-year, US\$118 million contract with Syngenta to collaborate on plant-science work. The remaining 35 researchers will move to other Syngenta laboratories at

Research Triangle Park in North Carolina.

TMRI president Steve Briggs will switch to Diversa, which specializes in identifying microbes from extreme environments. Stephen Goff, who oversaw Syngenta's role in the rice genome-sequencing project, will move to Research Triangle Park.

**Clarification** The Climate Action Network Europe (CAN Europe) study of hydrofluorocarbon emissions, reported in News (*Nature* 419, 656; 2002), contained an error. The emission of these gases is predicted by CAN Europe to be much lower than the number given in its report at the time *Nature's* article was written. The report has now been corrected; see [www.climnet.org/pubs/ozoneclimate.htm](http://www.climnet.org/pubs/ozoneclimate.htm) for the correct version and further details of the calculation.