



The icebreaker *Healy* is primarily used for scientific research.



CLIMATE CONFERENCE IN NAIROBI

Find out what happened at last week's convention on the Kyoto Protocol.

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Britain plans tough limits to curb emissions

The UK government clearly aimed to make a statement about climate change last week. And it succeeded. At the Queen's official opening of parliament on 15 November, it promised legislation that will see the country's greenhouse-gas emissions slashed to 60% of 1990 levels by 2050. That is a level far beyond its carbon-reduction commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, and a longer-term programme of cuts than any other major polluting country has so far adopted.

Is the British pledge as impressive as it sounds? The legislation has not yet been officially introduced into parliament — that will happen in the coming months when the government produces a draft bill. So, although the announcement is a powerful statement of intent, the details remain vague. "How the target is defined and set, and how progress is measured and reported, are fundamental issues that are still being considered," said a statement from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which is charged with drafting the legislation.

Opposition politicians and environmentalists have also pointed out that although the far-reaching target is laudable, the plan isn't so tough in the short term. Critics have called for the plan to involve fixed annual cuts in emissions, rather than the five-yearly targets suggested by the government. There is optimism, however, that the target is achievable — if improvements in energy efficiency are combined with the development of low-carbon technologies.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said of sorting out what should happen in the next phase of the Kyoto agreement. International talks in Nairobi, Kenya, last week were meant to address how to incorporate large developing economies such as China, India and Brazil into the treaty after 2012. On Friday, the summit's final day, the Kyoto nations decided to postpone the negotiation until 2008.

Michael Hopkin

in the Italian research system — such as recruitment. Rules alone won't stop dishonest hiring policies, says Modica, but universities that allow bad decisions to be made will now be stung by the evaluation system.

The second decree radically changes selection procedures for presidents of research organizations. These were previously direct government appointments — former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right administration appointed several research heads considered incompetent by much of the scientific community (see *Nature*

440, 264–265; 2006). Now independent committees will prepare shortlists of three candidates from which the research minister must pick.

The new rules are already being put into practice for the Italian space agency, whose previous president, Sergio Vetrella, has resigned under pressure from the government. The rules are also expected to make it easier for the government to oust Fabio Pistella, president of the National Research Council, which runs more than 100 research institutes around Italy. Pistella has evaded attempts to

transfer him to another post.

Scientists have welcomed the reforms. They will help a lot, even if funding levels for 2007 are modest, says physicist Giorgio Parisi of La Sapienza University in Rome. But after five successive years of cuts, he says it will be "disappointing" not to maintain at least 2006 levels.

The budget bill is now being considered by the Senate, on which Levi-Montalcini sits. She is reconciled with a relieved government whose coalition's majority in parliament is so narrow that every vote counts. ■ Alison Abbott