

Impasse at talks leaves whales high and dry

The 2009 meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in Madeira, Portugal, has ended in deadlock.

No consensus could be reached on Japan's proposal that it be allowed to resume commercial whaling in its own coastal waters — banned since 1986 — in exchange for reducing its quota of whales killed for 'scientific research' in Antarctic waters.

Scott Baker, a researcher at Oregon State University's Marine Mammal Institute in Newport, told the meeting that the number of coastal whales killed as 'by-catch' in fishing nets, and sold on Japanese markets, is under-reported. His team found that by-catch numbers approach 150 minke whales a year, roughly equivalent to those killed in Japan's North Pacific offshore whaling programme. A 2007 study (C. S. Baker *et al. Mol. Ecol.* 16, 2617–2626; 2007) found similar coastal by-catch depletion in South Korea.

The IWC also postponed a decision on Denmark's request for Greenland's indigenous Inuits to hunt 10 humpback whales a year.

Key polar research centres sign up to cooperative deal

European polar researchers could enjoy easier access to funding thanks to a cooperative deal between key institutes.

Twenty-six institutions associated with polar research signed up to the European Polar Framework on 24 June, including the British Antarctic Survey, Germany's Alfred-Wegener Institute and the Norwegian Polar Institute. Paul Egerton, executive director of the polar board for the European Science Foundation, which is behind the framework, told *Nature* he

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Polar scientists can expect easier access to funds.

Heritage alert for Central American reef

Belize's barrier-reef system (pictured) — the largest of its kind in the Northern Hemisphere — has been put on a danger list by the World Heritage Committee to encourage international support for its preservation.

The committee, part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), included the reef because it is threatened by development and the cutting back of mangroves. It has been on the World Heritage List of naturally important sites since 1996.

Also placed on the danger list is the Los Katios National Park in Colombia, which is at risk from logging. UNESCO added a further two natural sites to its World Heritage List: the Wadden Sea wetlands belonging to Germany and the Netherlands, and the Dolomites mountain range in Italy.



N. WU/SCIENCEFACTORY/CORBIS

hoped Russia would soon sign up too.

Funding rounds from separate national research programmes may be combined, and it should also be easier for researchers to secure places at other countries' research stations, says Egerton. The new framework, he adds, continues the spirit of International Polar Year, which ended in March 2009 (see *Nature* 457, 1074; 2009).

Recession deals a glancing blow to nanomaterials

Markets for carbon nanotubes, ceramic nanoparticles, nanocomposites and coatings have been dented following the downturn in the construction, electronics and automotive industries. But according to a report released last week, they should recover swiftly.

The report, by Lux Research, a market-analysis company in New York, projects that the revenue from products incorporating nanotechnology will reach US\$2.5 trillion worldwide in 2015 — a cut of 21% from the company's July 2008 projection.

But in a few years, revenue from affected nanomaterials and intermediates will bounce back to approach the previous estimates, the report says. And it notes that expected growth for nano-related products in the health-care and life-sciences sectors has hardly been affected by the recession.

African institutions gain support networks

African research, by many measures the least competitive in the world, got a financial pick-me-up this week.

On 2 July, the UK Wellcome Trust launched a £30-million (US\$50-million) plan to support more than 50 institutions

across the continent, organized in themed networks that will study water and sanitation, infectious diseases and population health.

"There are other collaborations and networks but the lack of research capacity in Africa is a huge problem and it's going to take more than one initiative to achieve this," says Jimmy Whitworth, the Wellcome Trust's head of international activities.

The funding will be used to revamp laboratories, to train laboratory personnel and to support competitive grants aimed at encouraging African scientists to remain working in their home countries.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/africafund>

SOUNDBITES: TALKING CLIMATE TARGETS

"The most ambitious and comprehensive piece of climate change legislation anywhere in the world."

Scotland's climate-change minister, Stewart Stevenson, as his country passed legislation on 24 June to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by 42% by 2020, and by 80% by 2050.

"A bold and necessary step."

US President Barack Obama hails the passage of the Waxman-Markey energy and climate-change bill through the House of Representatives on 26 June — by the narrow margin of 219 to 212 votes (see *Nature* 459, 493; 2009).

"We must move the debate from a stand-off over hypothetical figures to active negotiation on real mitigation actions and real contributions."

UK prime minister Gordon Brown suggests on 26 June that an international fund of US\$100 billion a year will be needed by 2020 to help developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change (see <http://tinyurl.com/m22pq9>).