

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## POLICY

### Price on carbon

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard has proposed a carbon dioxide tax of Aus\$23 (US\$25) per tonne for the country's top 500 emitters. The tax would come into effect from 1 July 2012, and the price would increase above inflation until an emissions-trading scheme replaced it in 2015. Gillard now faces a battle to convince Australian voters of her climate-policy package, announced on 10 July, although it already has enough parliamentary support to become law. See page 140 and [go.nature.com/aimkho](http://go.nature.com/aimkho) for more.

### Testing embryos

Germany's parliament has agreed to legalize some genetic testing on embryos generated by *in vitro* fertilization before they are implanted into a prospective mother's uterus. The vote, on 7 July, brings the country closer in line with the United States and most Western European countries, where preimplantation diagnosis of genetic abnormalities has been legal since the 1990s. See [go.nature.com/yoqdpw](http://go.nature.com/yoqdpw) for more.

### James Webb threat

Republicans in the US Congress are threatening to cancel the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST),

## NUMBER CRUNCH

# 164.79

The number of Earth years it takes for the planet Neptune to orbit the Sun. On 11 July, Neptune completed its first orbit since it was discovered on 23 September 1846.



B. INGALLS/NASA

## The shuttle's last launch

"*Atlantis* is flexing its muscles one final time," said NASA's television commentator as the space shuttle climbed away from Earth on 8 July. It is the 135th and last flight of NASA's

shuttle programme. *Atlantis* is currently docked with the International Space Station, where its four crew members are delivering supplies and spare parts, and is due to return on 20 July.

the successor to the Hubble Space Telescope. On 7 July, a House subcommittee voted to cut NASA's funding by US\$1.6 billion (from last year's enacted levels) and to strip the JWST of funding altogether. The telescope's steadily climbing price tag — currently estimated at \$6.5 billion — is devouring NASA's astrophysics budget. The vote was just the first step in a long legislative process, but comes as a warning shot to JWST supporters. See [go.nature.com/c57xiw](http://go.nature.com/c57xiw) for more.

### Nuclear checks

Japan's 54 nuclear power stations are to undergo stress tests in the wake of multiple meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, the government announced last week. The tests will be similar to ones now under

way in the European Union, and will consider the plants' preparedness for earthquakes and floods. As a result of the March earthquake that triggered the meltdown at Fukushima, only 19 of Japan's reactors are operating. It is unclear whether the stress testing will further delay restarts.

### China's oil spills

China's State Oceanic Administration (SOA) has been criticized for its delay in telling the public about two oil spills that have badly polluted 840 square kilometres in the Bohai Gulf, off the country's northeastern coast. On 5 July, the SOA held its first government briefing about the oil leaks, which occurred on 4 and 17 June. Oil spills are supposed to be immediately reported to the public. China's

offshore oil-drilling industry is booming, leading to fears that June's accidents may be followed by many more spills. See [go.nature.com/zf8bje](http://go.nature.com/zf8bje) for more.

### Europe's GM ruling

The European Parliament has voted to let European Union member states decide for themselves whether to ban genetically modified crops. Grounds for a ban would include public opinion or socioeconomic and environmental factors (including lack of data on potential environmental harm). The autonomy allowed in the 5 July vote goes further than that proposed by the European Commission, which had suggested that countries should be allowed to decide on all but health and environmental grounds, which

should be left to assessments by the European Food Safety Authority. Member states will discuss the text in October. See [go.nature.com/ecisdw](http://go.nature.com/ecisdw) for more.

## RESEARCH

## Synthetic organs

Surgeons have successfully replaced the windpipe of a cancer patient with a wholly synthetic trachea — showing that donors may not be needed for tracheal transplants. The patient, Andemariam Teklesenbet Beyene — a student of geology at the University of Iceland, Reykjavik — was discharged from the Karolinska University hospital in Stockholm on 9 July, a month after the transplant operation. Stem cells from his bone marrow were grown on a trachea-shaped scaffold of a nanocomposite material developed at University College London. See [go.nature.com/zvuxed](http://go.nature.com/zvuxed) for more.

## Telescope damage

A leak of more than 100 litres of coolant has shut down the 8-metre Subaru telescope. The telescope, Japan's largest, is perched atop Hawaii's Mauna Kea mountain. The telescope's interim director, Hideki Takami, says that the instrument will be out of



commission for at least two weeks. Coolant from cables in the telescope's top section leaked onto its main mirror (pictured, marbled with orange coolant) and various electronic instruments, on 2 July. See [go.nature.com/kg2usy](http://go.nature.com/kg2usy) for more.

## Endangered tuna

Some of the world's most commercially valuable fish species should be classed as globally endangered, a study reported on 7 July. Researchers assessed 61 species of scombrids and billfish, applying criteria used by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Gland, Switzerland, to produce its Red List of endangered species. Seven species — mostly tuna or marlin — are vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered, they found (B. Collette *et al.* *Science* doi:10.1126/science.1208730;

2011). The assessment was published just before a key meeting on tuna catches in La Jolla, California, on 11–15 July. See [go.nature.com/llhcf7](http://go.nature.com/llhcf7) for more.

## A pinch of salt

A meta-analysis has questioned the oft-repeated connection between the consumption of too much salt and the development of cardiovascular disease. The study, published on 6 July (R. S. Taylor *et al.* *Am. J. Hypertens.* doi:10.1038/ajh.2011.115; 2011), examined the results of seven clinical studies and found no solid proof that reducing salt consumption prevents heart conditions. “Whilst intuitively reducing salt across the board appears to be a good thing, I would say we still need the evidence to prove it,” says Rod Taylor, a statistician at the University of Exeter, UK, and the study's leader. See [go.nature.com/mszubs](http://go.nature.com/mszubs) for more.

## PEOPLE

## Journal chief

A nascent open-access life-sciences journal from three major biomedical research funders will be edited by cell biologist Randy Schekman. The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) said on 11 July that Schekman, who has been editor of the *Proceedings of the National*

## COMING UP

## 16 JULY

NASA's Dawn spacecraft should reach Vesta, one of the largest bodies of the asteroid belt (see page 147).  
[go.nature.com/gga1b2](http://go.nature.com/gga1b2)

## 17–20 JULY

The International AIDS Society holds its biennial conference on HIV treatment and prevention, in Rome, Italy.  
[go.nature.com/wnr8b5](http://go.nature.com/wnr8b5)

## 21–27 JULY

More results from the Large Hadron Collider and the Tevatron are expected at a conference on high-energy physics in Grenoble, France.  
[go.nature.com/7fyjlb](http://go.nature.com/7fyjlb)

*Academy of Sciences* since 2006, will begin his new job in August. The as-yet-unnamed online journal, expected to launch next year, is the brainchild of the HHMI, the Max Planck Society and the Wellcome Trust. See [go.nature.com/p1h5vl](http://go.nature.com/p1h5vl) for more.

## FUNDING

## Oil-spill study

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) will spend US\$25.2 million over the next five years studying the effects of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the health of the general population in the area. The study, announced on 7 July, will focus on vulnerable populations including pregnant women, children, immigrants, fishermen and minorities. It complements an existing NIH project to monitor the health of 55,000 oil-spill clean-up workers and volunteers for up to 10 years.

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## TREND WATCH

Global investments in renewable energy in 2010 jumped by 32% from 2009, to US\$211 billion. The fraction spent on research and development in the sector also rose, by 41% to \$8.6 billion. Although corporate research spending dropped (see chart), government support soared, owing to the ‘green stimulus’ packages announced in the throes of the financial crisis. Solar power, up by 8% to \$3.6 billion, commanded the largest share of research funding. See [go.nature.com/eftyjh](http://go.nature.com/eftyjh) for more.

## STATE SPENDING BOOSTS RENEWABLES RESEARCH

‘Stimulus’ packages mean that state spending has overtaken private spending on renewable-energy research and development (R&D).

