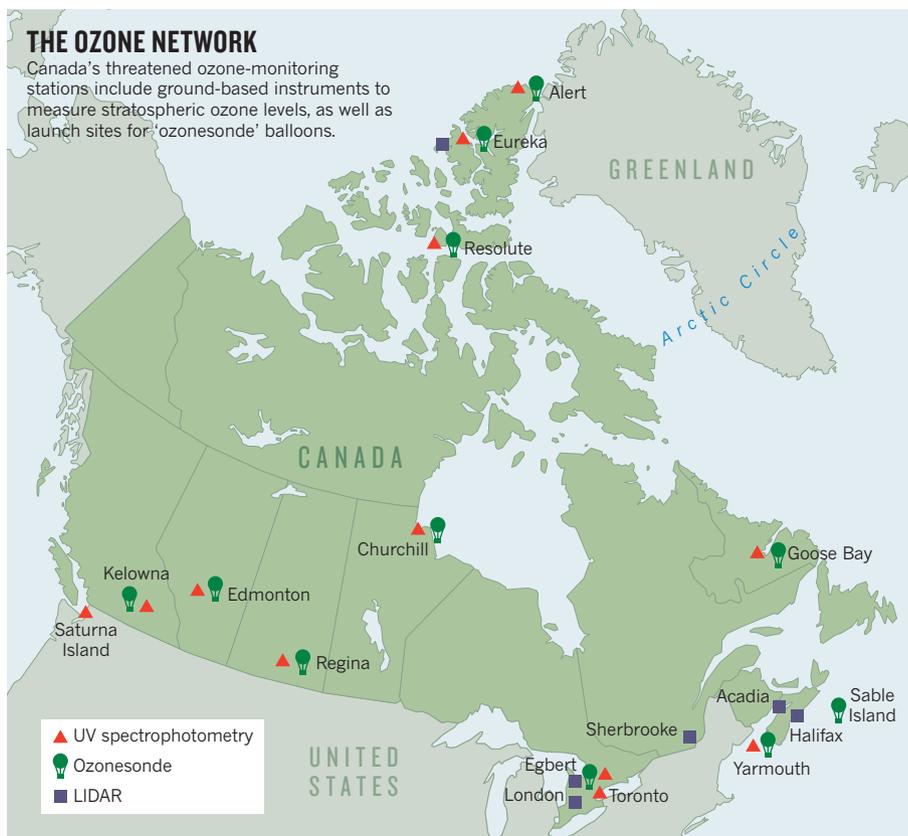


► Zurich who chairs the World Meteorological Organization's ozone science advisory group. Indeed, *in situ* data are essential for calibrating and validating measurements by satellites such as NASA's Aura and the European Space Agency's Envisat.

Stahelin adds that the Canadian agency has said it will no longer host the Toronto-based World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre, an archive of data collected over several decades and used intensively by atmospheric scientists around the world. "It appears that the management at Environment Canada was not fully aware of the consequences of its decision," says Stahelin. Last month, the agency notified its staff that a total of 776 jobs will be cut.

Canadian environmental research has already been hit hard by the looming closure of the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences, which provides the majority of funds for climate and atmospheric science in the country. The charitable foundation has received no federal funding since 2003, and is expected to close next year.

"The funding crisis in this country is really hammering our ability to observe and protect the environment of Canada," says Duck. "I have already lost most of my group because I just can't pay them any more. If help doesn't come soon, many others will shut up shop." ■



SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES

Nurse takes Royal Society's pulse

President plans wider role for Britain's national academy.

BY GEOFF BRUMFIEL

For Paul Nurse, few things are off-limits. Since taking over as president of Britain's Royal Society in December last year, he has been overseeing a strategic review that is likely to lead to the first change to the society's charter since it was signed by King Charles II in 1662.

The change is relatively minor (it extends the terms of office for the society's council members), but it gives a good indication of how he is likely to approach his five-year tenure. "I felt we should look at everything we do, root and branch," he says over morning tea in the society's august central-London headquarters.

Nurse wants the society to have a stronger voice on the big policy questions of the day. "The Royal Society has a responsibility to provide advice on difficult issues, even if they are contentious," he says.

He hopes to boost the society's role in government decision-making by fostering greater involvement of its roughly 1,500 fellows and foreign members in preparing reports,

potentially with the help of more policy staff. Nurse also wants to expand the number of authoritative and influential reports on key issues, such as nuclear power, climate change and the definition of life. The society has long produced such reports, most recently on the global scientific enterprise and on the potential threats and opportunities offered by geoengineering to mitigate climate change. But Nurse sees an opportunity to do more on a broader range of topics, with an eye for increasing the society's global reach. "I think the world would listen to us," he says.

Not everyone is convinced. "The first thing it should do is get a big bookshelf and put it in the basement to store the reports," says Daniel Greenberg, a journalist based in Washington DC who has devoted his career to studying the intersection of science and policy. The US National Academy of Sciences, which produces many more reports than its British counterpart, has relatively little influence

over the political process, he says. "Nobody in politics reads an academic report, slaps the side of their head and says 'Wow!'," he says.

Others suggest that the society could gain more influence by choosing its topics carefully. National Academy reports can sometimes shift the tone of a debate, says David Goldston, who was chief of staff on the US House Committee on Science from 2001 to 2006. And Robert May, a zoologist at the University of Oxford, UK, and former president of the society, points out that a 2002 report on foot-and-mouth disease helped to set up national vaccination strategies to prevent widespread cattle culling during future outbreaks. That report was successful in part because the society consulted closely with politicians and bureaucrats throughout, says May.

Nurse insists that the society will focus on "big areas that are important to our society" — not just those immediately relevant to policy-makers. Through conferences and studies, the society should also draw attention to the biggest mysteries in science, he says. "What is life? What is the beginning of the Universe? You know, that type of question." ■

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