

Spain in the frame for Europe's bid to host fusion reactor

London A committee asked to assess two proposed European sites for ITER, a US\$5-billion fusion reactor, has chosen Vandellòs in Spain above Cadarache in France.

The partners working on the research reactor — the European Union, Canada, Japan, Russia, China and the United States — hope to select a site by the end of the year. Europe believes it will have a better chance of fighting off competition from Canada and Japan, who are also preparing bids, if it puts forward a single site.

As neither France nor Spain is willing to step down, the European Commission (EC) asked an independent group of science administrators in May to examine the sites at Vandellòs, near Barcelona, and Cadarache, an existing nuclear research facility in southern France. The committee, led by David King, science adviser to the UK government, has not yet released its report, but is thought to back the Spanish site as the cheaper option.

The EC will use the report next month to help prepare a proposal for the decision-making European Council of Ministers at the end of September. France is expected to lobby against the committee's verdict.

Journal editor quits hot seat over global-warming study

Munich Three editors of the journal *Climate Research* resigned last week over a published paper claiming that current global warming falls within the range of natural variability.

The finding was seized upon by some conservative US politicians, but has been attacked by climate researchers. Critics questioned the methods used by the authors — astronomers Willie Soon and Sallie Baliunas of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Massachusetts — to compare proxies for climate change such as tree-ring growth (W. Soon and S. Baliunas *Clim. Res.* 23, 89–110; 2003).

Hans von Storch, a coastal researcher at the GKSS, an environmental research centre in Geesthacht, Germany, and the journal's editor in chief, wanted to publish an editorial conceding that the paper's errors should have been spotted during peer review. Von Storch and two other editors resigned after the editorial board's remaining members failed to agree on the text of the editorial.

Otto Kinne, the journal's publisher, says he backed the editorial but that von Storch resigned before the board had given it the green light. The journal will publish a different online editorial on 5 August, accepting that it should have "insisted on solid evidence and cautious formulations before publication".

Australia beefs up an udder genome project

Sydney The CSIRO, Australia's main national research agency, last week announced plans to donate A\$1.5 million (US\$1 million) to the international effort to sequence the cow genome. The organization says that it hopes to milk the genome project for all it's worth to give Australian industry an edge over international competitors.

The US National Human Genome Research Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, provisionally approved the Bovine Genome Project in March, pledging half of the project's US\$50-million cost if the remainder can be raised from elsewhere.

Assuming that the funds can be obtained, sequencing should begin in September, mainly at Baylor College of Medicine's Human Genome Sequencing Center in Houston, Texas.



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All change at the top for French research

Paris French scientists will return from their long summer holidays at the end of this month to find a new set of leaders running their country's research effort.

In a large reshuffle, science minister Claudie Haigneré last week removed Geneviève Berger as director general of the CNRS, the national research agency. Berger, who is three years into a four-year term, will be replaced by Bernard Larrouturou, current head of the INRIA, the national computing agency. Haigneré said that Larrouturou will bring stronger leadership and a new impetus to the 25,000-strong CNRS.

Bernard Bigot, head of Haigneré's office, will become high commissioner of the Atomic Energy Commission. His post will be filled by Philippe Braidy, financial director of the national space agency, the CNES.

The reshuffle coincides with a promise by the government that research will be spared in next year's budget, and suggests that Haigneré is preparing for a busy time this autumn, when her new team starts work.

Worldwide agricultural effort aims to help world's poor

London An ambitious attempt to assess how agricultural technology can aid farming in developing countries was approved last week.

Delegates from the United Nations, industry, environmental groups and consumer organizations met from 31 July to 2 August in Budapest, Hungary, to finalize plans for the assessment, which was initiated last year by the World Bank. Over the next three years, hundreds of experts will work with local and regional stakeholders to pool knowledge about agricultural technology. The resulting compendium will provide the inhabitants of developing countries with solutions to water management, irrigation, soil erosion and other problems.

"This is the first global intergovernmental attempt to assess how agriculture can promote development, and what science and technology have to offer," says Louise Fresco, assistant director general of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

The effort will be chaired by Bob Watson, the World Bank's chief scientist. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, of which Watson is a former director, will serve as a blueprint for the exercise.

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Meeting agrees on unified vision of Earth

Washington The need for a global observation system was acknowledged last week by delegates from more than 30 nations at the Earth Observation Summit in Washington DC (see *Nature* 424, 357; 2003).

Attendees agreed to begin work on a ten-year implementation plan for the system, which will involve sharing data from hundreds of sensors on the ground, in the ocean and in space. The scheme will also increase aid to developing countries to help them make better use of environmental sensors. A framework for the plan is expected to be ready for a ministers' conference on Earth observation in Tokyo next spring.



Satellite images, such as this of a Chilean mine, will form part of a new Earth-observation system.

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