edited by JOCELYN KAISER

IGBP

Success story. ICSU geosphere project measures trace gases.

ICSU to Get With The Times

Science has changed quite a bit since 1931, when professional societies banded together to form the International Council of Scientific Unions. But ICSU hasn't undergone a soul-searching in decades, and this fall it should learn what it needs to do to remain relevant to 21st-century scientists.

The ICSU—an alliance of 23 international scientific societies and national bodies from 94 countries—is best known for arranging conferences and fostering interdisciplinary efforts such as the International Geosphere-Biosphere program. But 2 years ago, while reviewing the United States' $3.7 million payment to the council, an outside committee suggested a similar review of ICSU's management structure.

The new panel is expected to suggest ways that the Paris-based ICSU could take advantage of greater openness since the Cold War's end, make better use of electronic communications, and respond more quickly to emerging technological issues. "Everybody agrees that ICSU has had some great successes, going back to the International Geophysical Year [in 1957–58]," says Roland Schmitt, president emeritus of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, and the panel's chair. "But with the increasing demands on science ... from the developing world, and ever-tightening national science budgets, the question is how to continue finding international and interdisciplinary responses to the problems we face." The panel's report will be presented in September in Washington to ICSU's general assembly, which could act on some recommendations immediately and hold off on others until its next meeting in 1999.

Final Indirect-Cost Rule Satisfies Few

University officials have been poring over a final U.S. rule on indirect cost rates known as "circular A-21"—issued last month by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB)—hoping to discover scraps of good news. But most have been disappointed, finding only a promise of more red tape.

The best that can be said of the new rule, says Julie Norris, head of the office of sponsored programs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is that "it's a mixed bag." While it affirms in principle that universities may negotiate fees for certain indirect costs associated with federally sponsored research, it also imposes new bookkeeping requirements on many schools.

For more than a decade, OMB has been haggling with academia to simplify circular A-21, a guide for determining how much research centers may charge the government for overhead. Some politicians had suggested universities were gouging taxpayers, while schools claimed they were paying more than their fair share. After prolonged talks with the universities, OMB issued a final decision on 8 May. In addition to requiring that everyone follow the same accounting methods, the new A-21 denies some long-cherished perks. For example, after 1998, schools won't be able to deduct the cost of subsidizing tuitions for faculty dependents; and specially tailored fees for library usage, utility bills, and student services will end.

Despite A-21's rigidities, says James Kemp, a research administrator at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, "this new regulatory burden may put additional pressure on universities to re-engineer more efficient and effective administrative systems," which would be good for researchers and the public, says Kemp.

French Gene-Sequencing Center in the Works

Science has learned that the French government, eager to play a major part in international efforts to sequence the human genome, is planning to establish a national gene-sequencing center, probably near Paris. Although details remain to be worked out, the center's director has already been chosen: Jean Weissenbach, now head of the Généthon research center in the Paris suburb of Evry. Généthon, together with the Paris-based Centre d'Étude du Polymorphisme Humain, has played a crucial role in mapping the human genome, a first step toward full-scale sequencing (*Science*, 22 December 1995, p. 1919).

According to sources familiar with these developments, French President Jacques Chirac has been on the verge of making an official announcement for several months. Despite France's contributions to human genome research, cuts in government research funding have allowed the initiative to pass to other players, particularly the Whitehead Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. France is now ready to move, but the final plan has been delayed by an ongoing debate—involving Chirac's science adviser, Alain Devaquet, and other science officials—over the center's location and budget.

The new sequencing center must have adequate funds to succeed, says Piotr Slonimski, head of the GREG genome research center near Paris, which has lost almost all of its funding for next year. "You can't do it with half measures," he says. The leading choice for the site of the new center is near Généthon in Evry. A final decision on the center is expected later this month.

New Chief for Salk?

Once again, it seems the Salk Institute for Biological Studies has selected a candidate to head the prestigious La Jolla, California, institution, which has been skipperless since Francis Crick resigned last summer. According to well-placed sources, the latest pick is Thomas D. Pollard, a cell biologist at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Pollard, a National Academy of Sciences member who studies muscle proteins, is the latest in a long list of potential Salk chiefs—several of whom turned down the job offer. Pollard says "I definitely haven't accepted yet," but "there's no doubt that we're talking."

Researchers Ready for Animal Activists

Biomedical scientists are gearing up to counter what's being touted as "the largest gathering of animal advocates ever assembled" in Washington, D.C. Organizers of the first-ever "Animal Awareness Week," 20 to 24 June, expect to draw 50,000 animal-rights activists for meetings and demonstrations, including protests against animal research.

The activists, who've planned events such as workshops on xenotransplants and circus animals and a talk by chimp expert Jane Goodall, say they aren't associated with "animal liberation" groups known for vandalizing research labs. Nevertheless, the nearby National Institutes of Health plans to beef up security. What also worries researchers is the activists' plan to lobby for several draft bills that would limit animal toxicity tests and ban selling abandoned pets to research facilities, says Frankie Trull, head of the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR). "Thousands of animal-rights people on [Capitol] Hill is potentially a problem," says Trull.

NABR is planning a 17 June press conference to "tell Congress the other side of the story," says Trull. Another group, Americans for Medical Progress, is bringing in AIDS activists to "drive home the point that without animal research there will be no cure for AIDS," says spokesperson Jacquie Calnan.