

Keeping Deep-Sea Research Afloat

■ Fans of a popular undersea research program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are hoping to build a breakwater around it and fend off marauding raids by White House budget cutters.

For the past 9 years, the Office of Management and Budget has tried to kill the National Undersea Research Program (NURP), requesting no money for it from Congress. And each year, legislators have ignored the White House and kept the 11-year-old program running, steadily increasing its funding from \$3.3 million in 1980 to \$16.3 million in 1991. Now, several members of Congress are trying to end this annual budget game by

sponsoring a bill that would officially establish NURP and authorize a doubling of funds over the next 5 years, reaching \$40 million in 1996.

Congress loves NURP because "academia loves NURP," as a congressional staffer says. In 1990, more than 600 researchers won NURP grants for projects ranging from studies of coral reef ecosystems to exploration of submarine volcanoes. However, spokespersons for the Bush Administration contend there's no reason for NOAA to foot the bill, since there's ample funding for undersea research from the National Science Foundation. "We believe the facilities provided by NURP should be

funded by the users," says Ned A. Ostenso, a NOAA research official.

Despite the administration's strong opposition, congressional staffers predict the NURP bill will pass in the spring. And there's a bit of sea pork thrown in: Amendments sponsored by Michigan and New Jersey representatives call for two NURP centers, one located in a state bordering the Great Lakes (Michigan borders four of the five) and the other in a state bordering the New York bight (essentially the Jersey Shore).



Diver hovers over a teeming coral reef ecosystem, a candidate for NURP research.

Voltage Rising in EMF Research

■ Researchers studying the biological effects of electromagnetic fields (EMF) are expecting to see a big increase in federal and private funding soon, perhaps as much as \$15 million to \$20 million a year. Several scientists—ranging from policy analyst Granger Morgan of Carnegie-



EMF generator.

Mellon University to epidemiologist David Savitz of the University of North Carolina—say they have heard reports that a number of institutions, including the Department of Energy (DOE), are considering a budget increase in this area. But no decisions have been made yet.

DOE official Marvin Gunn, who coordinated a 20 November strategy workshop on EMF for the agency, says funding levels will be determined by the "powers above"—meaning the secretary of energy and the Office of Management and Bud-

get. DOE now spends about \$5 million a year, but an appropriations bill that passed in August designated DOE lead agency for government-funded EMF research.

While no one has any "new money" yet, strategists are already planning how to spend it. At the November workshop, DOE brought together interested researchers to help develop a priority list. The consensus, says one attendee, was that 70% of the emphasis should be on scientific studies, 20% on engineering and measurement, and 10% on policy analysis and communication with the public. The draft DOE strategy, says Gunn, should be ready for public comment by late January.

Iran to Bail Out Physics Center

■ Threatened by financial disaster, the International Center for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, Italy, may close its doors at least temporarily on 1 January, unless it receives an emergency loan soon. And it looks as though a bailout may be on the way, coming from a surprising source: Iran's minister of education.

The physics center, brainchild of Nobel laureate Abdus Salam—one of the three creators of the electroweak theory of fundamental forces—has long been plagued by tight budgets. Earlier this year, ICTP officials began tightening the center's belt by canceling scientific workshops and delaying staff pay raises. But this bought

only a few months' relief for the ICTP, which hosts symposia and conferences for roughly 4000 scientists a year and runs microprocessor, high-temperature superconductor, and laser/optical-fiber labs that are primarily used by scientists from developing countries.

The ICTP staff decided to alert the world to the funding crisis, warning in a widely circulated 4 November letter that the center would run out of money by year's end and remain closed for up to 6 months. The doors would reopen, the letter said, only after the Italian government provided new funds. Later this month the Italian Senate is expected to ratify a measure that would authorize 90% of the center's 1991-1998 budget, or about \$15 million a year, says an ICTP spokeswoman, but the funding won't become available for 3 to 6 months.

However, the Iranian loan will enable ICTP to avoid a shutdown. Rescue will arrive in the form of a \$2.5-million loan, which the Iranian government granted after a plea from Iranian physicist Daemi Ranjbar, who heads ICTP's Center for High-energy and Particle Physics.

Academy Misconduct Review Delayed

■ If you're waiting for a report on scientific misconduct due out this month from a joint committee of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine, don't peer in the mailbox just yet. The report's debut has been delayed until March.

The word from the academy is that committee members are trying to "absorb and incorporate new information" on misconduct investigations, culled from congressional testimony and elsewhere, that has surfaced over the past year, an NAS spokeswoman says. The "Study on Scientific Responsibility and the Conduct of Science" is being co-sponsored by a consortium of nine agencies, including the National Research Council, the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Energy.