

OSI Misconduct Model Shunned in Europe

Worried by the damage recent high-profile scientific misconduct investigations have done to U.S. biomedical research, the Danish Medical Research Council (MRC) is preparing to establish an independent national committee in Denmark that will investigate whistleblowers' complaints. But the Danish committee, which will be the first of its kind in Europe, is unlikely to bear much relation to NIH's Office of Scientific Integrity (OSI), largely because MRC chairman Daniel Andersen believes that the whole U.S. system for tackling mis-

conduct is seriously flawed.

Unlike OSI, which uses outside scientists only as consultants and follows what critics have called "quasi-judicial" investigative procedures, the Danish committee will consist of six prominent biomedical researchers and a high court judge who will ensure that the committee follows appropriate judicial procedures. In an even more striking departure from the U.S. model, Andersen wants misconduct allegations sent straight to the new committee without an initial inquiry at the research institution. Says Andersen: "As soon as an institution is involved, they make errors."

While it's not clear that such a committee could cope with the volume of allegations in a larger country, Andersen hopes that other European research agencies will follow suit. So far, Europe-wide consensus seems unlikely: Several Scandinavian countries are interested in the Danish model, but most European research agencies remain convinced that researchers' employers should be responsible for policing misconduct.

Fortran to Get a New Look—Again, Already

The Fortran computer language—long a workhorse for scientists and engineers—should get its second

overhaul in as many years by this fall, courtesy of a group of computer scientists who want to bring the language up to speed for massively parallel supercomputers.

Just last year, researchers completed Fortran's first major tuneup in more than a decade. But while "Fortran 90" is widely hailed as a great improvement over its predecessor, it is still haunted by what computer scientists call the "data distribution problem"—the language's inability to manipulate data efficiently on parallel processors. So a group of computer scientists from academia, industry, and government convened by Rice University scientist Ken Kennedy have proposed a solution: High Performance Fortran (HPF), a version of the language intended for use on both single and parallel processor computers.

In addition to giving Fortran more number-crunching power, the architects of the new effort hope to dissuade computer firms from developing incompatible versions of the language—an aim partly inspired by the way variants of the UNIX operating system sprang up throughout academia and the private sector in the mid-1980s. This welter of UNIX varieties continues to complicate life for researchers who run the same programs on different computers.

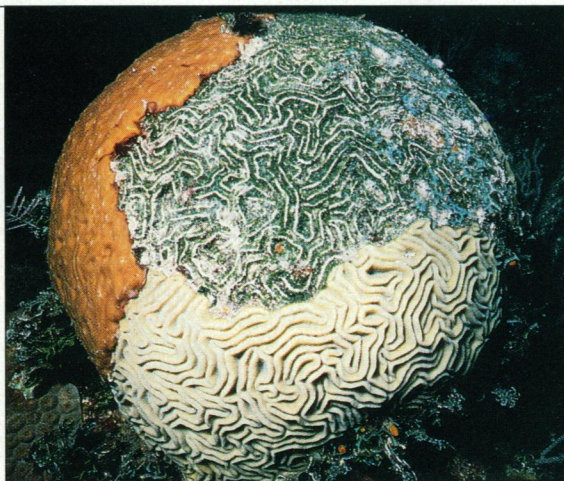
To date, computer vendors are fully on board. For instance, Intel and Digital last month announced a joint software initiative to develop an HPF compiler—a venture that company officials expect to bear commercial fruit by early next year.

Congress Ponders Aid for Coral Reef Research

Most marine ecologists believe that episodes of coral bleaching in 1987 and 1990 spell deep trouble for the world's species-rich coral reefs—but with research funds hard to come by, they lack solid data to back up their fears. Congress, however, could soon answer their pleas, if two bills that would mandate long-term reef studies can survive the vicissitudes of an election year.

One bill offered by Representative James Scheuer (D-NY) would authorize \$12 million for a variety of reef research over the next 3 years. Among other things, this funding would pay for studies of coral diseases, the bleaching phenomenon, and the quality of coastal and marine waters where reefs are found. A second bill introduced by Representative Walter Jones (D-NC) suggests an almost identical research plan, but also includes some controversial environmental protection provisions, such as one that would hold boaters liable for damage they cause to reefs.

The proposed research agenda drew wide praise from scientific panels at hearings last month, as well as some grumbling about the modest financial commit-



Whiter whites. Coral bleaching may soon get more study.

ment. "In the long run, it's probably not enough," admits a Scheuer aide. "But it's enough to get the ball rolling." But before that ball rolls anywhere, the coral bills must win approval from three separate House committees, the full House and Senate, and then the White House—no easy task when 66 senators are the only participants not focused on reelection.

The Last Gasp of the Richards Panel

Now that it's produced a scathing critique of the conclusions in NIH's long-running misconduct investigation of intramural AIDS researcher Robert Gallo, the Richards panel—an external committee of consultants charged with watchdogging the investigation—appears to have gone out of business. At least that's the view of chairman and Yale biochemist Frederic Richards, who wrote in a 12 May letter to NIH Director Bernadine Healy that her acceptance of NIH's final investigative report has left "nothing further for the panel to consider."

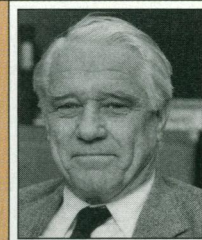
But Richards' letter, which is a reply to an 11 May letter from Healy, suggests that his panel's parting with NIH is hardly amicable. Some panel members have previously complained that Healy ignored their sharp criticism of Gallo—a charge she has denied—and in his letter Richards appears to caution Healy against attempting to play down her

differences with the panel.

For instance, in her letter Healy referred to what she characterized as "the doubts you [Richards] have expressed to us about those comments [in the critique]" and noted that she would pass on Richards' "doubts" to an NIH advisory panel that will consider whether administrative action against Gallo is warranted. Richards fired back: "I have no doubts about our comments then or now.... To imply that the consultants may not stand behind the evaluations stated in the comments would be a serious distortion of their views."



Bernadine Healy



Frederic Richards