

eral (five to seven) research groups were gathered together—on the basis of sometimes questionable affinity—and granted a bulk sum to be shared (approximately \$6000 per single group, on average). A small number of the actually “coordinated” projects were also funded, but these grants did not exceed and often fell well (50%) below those of the originally single proposals. As is CNR’s tradition, these funds will likely be available to research groups in several months.

Government funding policies contrast with those of private funding agencies, including the Italian Association for Cancer Research and the Telethon Foundation, which have been granting adequate funds to highly selected groups for the past several years. For a number of reasons, CNR committees dare not adopt the rigorously selective criteria used in most developed countries. The rising costs of scientific research, an inflation rate of the national currency likely to exceed 5% this year, and its considerable devaluation make international competition extremely difficult for Italian research groups.

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The Cost of Downsizing

In Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark* (1), the Bellman cries, “I have said it thrice: What I tell you three times is true.” John H. Gibbons, the Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, similarly prepares us for an incorrect conclusion in his editorial “The politics of science” (14 July, p. 143) when he asserts that “the spendthrift budgets of the 1980s and early 1990s were unsustainable and mortgaged much of our national future. To pay that inherited mortgage, we have made significant changes in the federal research system by downsizing, restructuring, and deregulating. We will need to do even more.”

Downsizing can lead to a diminishment not only of research but also of future business profits, if new scientific ideas are not developed that lead to the industries of the future. Nobody decades ago would have predicted that so much of our economy would involve computers or lasers. Might the Bose-

Einstein condensation, recently discovered in a government-supported laboratory (2), be the base of future huge industries? Or might new scientific ideas based on observing the Bose-Einstein condensation or other new laboratory developments lead to importantly profitable ventures? We cannot know in advance, but the record shows that basic research can eventually pay off big. Even Michael Faraday was once questioned as to what good this newfangled relation between electricity and magnetism could possibly be. So it seems shortsighted to do “even more” downsizing, and I am sorry to see the President’s science adviser calling for it.

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Land for Florida’s Fauna

In the news article “Filling in Florida’s gaps: Species protection done right” (*Frontiers in Biology: Ecology*, 21 July, p. 318), Charles C.

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