

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

China emissions

China announced on 19 December that it will press ahead with a national carbon-trading system to limit greenhouse-gas emissions, despite delays in its implementation. The system will require polluters to pay to emit carbon dioxide, and will initially cover more than 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ that are emitted each year by the country's power plants. That would make it the world's largest carbon market, almost double the size of the European Union's emissions-trading system. China had hoped to launch the national scheme last year, but officials have yet to set a launch date.

Gene therapy

The US Food and Drug Administration has approved for the first time a gene therapy for a disease caused by mutations in a specific gene. The decision, announced on 19 December, will allow Spark Therapeutics of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to market the treatment, voretigene neparvovec-rzyl (Luxturna),

to people with a rare hereditary blindness. Luxturna is a modified virus that is injected into the eye to deliver a correct copy of the mutated gene. The healthy gene instructs cells in the retina to produce a protein that allows them to respond to light.

Science rebuffed

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has eliminated a cabinet-level government ministry for science, leaving the country without a science minister for only the second time since 1931. Turnbull announced the move, along with the creation of a lower-level science ministry, on 19 December as part of a broader cabinet shake-up. Michaelia Cash, the former acting minister for industry, innovation and science, becomes minister for jobs and innovation. Zed Seselja is the new assistant minister for science. Some researchers have said that the decision is inconsistent with the government's stated commitment to putting science at the centre of policymaking.



PEOPLE

Neuroscientist dies

US neuroscientist Ben Barres (pictured) — known for his pioneering studies of brain cells called glia, and for championing diversity in academia — died on 27 December, aged 63. Barres' laboratory at Stanford University in California showed that glial cells — non-neuronal cells that are the most numerous cell type in the brain — had a central and previously unappreciated role in supporting crucial neural circuits in the brain. Born Barbara Barres in 1954, he transitioned genders in 1997. Barres campaigned hard for equal opportunities in science for women, minorities and

early-career researchers. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2016. See go.nature.com/2cafvy for more.

Librarian freed

An appeals court in Egypt has overturned a prison sentence against Ismail Serageldin, the retired founding director of the country's renowned Alexandria Library. Last July, Serageldin was found guilty of negligent management of the library, and sentenced to three and a half years in jail. Many considered the allegations politically motivated, and an international campaign was launched to free him. The charges were dismissed in a hearing on 26 December. The original Alexandria Library was created around the fourth century BC, when the city was the intellectual centre of the Hellenic world. It burnt down six centuries later. In 2001, Serageldin returned to Egypt from abroad to rebuild it in its modern form.

SPACE

NASA competition

On 20 December, NASA chose two missions as finalists for its latest planetary-exploration programme. One, the Comet Astrobiology Exploration Sample Return (CAESAR) mission, would retrieve material from comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, which the European Space Agency's Rosetta spacecraft orbited and landed on between 2014 and 2016. The other would fly to multiple locations on Saturn's moon Titan to sample its chemically complex surface and atmosphere. One of the proposals will be selected in 2019 to be built and launched in the mid-2020s.

STANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

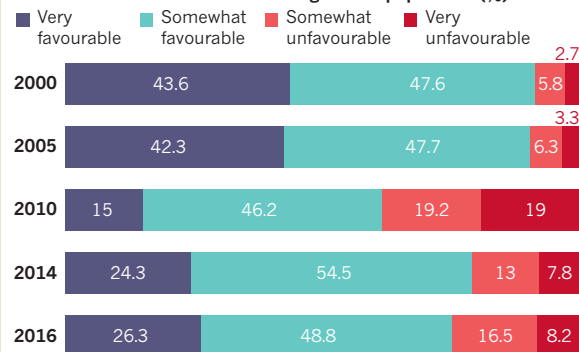
TREND WATCH

France increased its number of compulsory infant vaccinations from 3 to 11 on 1 January, in the face of rising public distrust of vaccines and health authorities. Public surveys show that France has one of the lowest levels of confidence in vaccines in the world. Immunizations against diphtheria, tetanus and polio are already compulsory; the added vaccines are those against mumps, measles, rubella, whooping cough, hepatitis B, pneumonia, meningitis C and the *Haemophilus influenzae* bacterium.

FRANCE BOOSTS COMPULSORY INFANT VACCINATIONS

France has tightened its immunization rules, but it has one of the highest rates of vaccine distrust in the world.

Attitudes towards vaccination among French population (%)



Data from surveys of people aged 18–75.

SOURCE: PUBLIC HEALTH FRANCE

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