

## POLICY

### Red-tape reduction

The European Commission has reduced the amount of red tape for scientists applying for grants under its flagship research-funding programme, according to a report released on 6 November by the European Court of Auditors (ECA). The commission had sought to cut bureaucracy in the latest iteration of the €76.4-billion (US\$86-billion) Horizon 2020 framework programme. Measures included centralizing support services and developing a single rule book for participation. These changes reduced the administrative burden on grant applicants, the ECA found, and cut the time between applying for and receiving a grant. But the report also notes areas that need improvement; for example, it says that the commission could do more to help researchers who submit high-quality, but unsuccessful, applications to obtain funding from other sources.

### Chemical strategy

The European Commission adopted on 7 November a strategy to crack down on the use of endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). The chemicals unbalance hormone systems, and evidence suggests that they damage human health and affect wildlife. The 28 European commissioners — one from each member country — approved a long-awaited plan for regulating EDCs, which are found in everyday products as well as in some pesticides and biocides, and are linked to disorders including cancer, obesity and lowered fertility. The plan includes further research, a check on current EDC legislation to pinpoint weaknesses, and the development of improved testing methods.



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## Huge oil-pipeline project blocked

A federal judge in Montana has blocked construction of the Keystone XL pipeline — which would enable transport of oil from the tar sands of Alberta, Canada, to refineries along the Gulf of Mexico. The administration of US President Donald Trump had “simply discarded” the project’s potential impacts on greenhouse-gas emissions, rather than justifying its decision to issue a permit for the pipeline, the judge said

in an 8 November ruling. Former president Barack Obama had rejected the project in 2015 after an analysis suggested that it would increase greenhouse-gas emissions. The state department issued a permit in March 2017 after Trump took office, but environmentalists and Indigenous-rights groups — some of whom had protested against the controversial project (pictured) — challenged the move in federal court.

But critics, including Brussels-based EDC-Free Europe, a coalition of more than 70 environmental, health, women’s and consumer groups, said the plan lacked concrete measures to reduce harmful exposures.

## CONSERVATION

### Horse culls

Ninety Australian scientists are calling for the repeal of a June 2018 law that protects free-roaming horses in the country’s alpine regions. The Kosciuszko Science Accord demands that the New South Wales government acknowledge the “potentially irreparable

damage” that the horses, which are technically feral, are causing to the iconic Kosciuszko National Park in the state’s southeast. The statement was signed at a conference on the impact of the horses — which are harming plants and fragile ecosystems — held at the Australian Academy of Science’s Shine Dome in Canberra. It also demands that New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, whose jurisdictions cover the Australian Alps, cooperate to remove the horses through aerial culling, which is banned in New South Wales, or other effective means. Scientists estimate that there

are 7,000–8,000 free-roaming horses in the Australian Alps. See [go.nature.com/2rocfrb](http://go.nature.com/2rocfrb) for more.

## EVENTS

### Koreas TB deal

North Korea and South Korea will establish a joint response system for fighting contagious diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), a major public-health threat in North Korea. A pilot programme, set to begin by the end of the year, will see the two nations exchange information on contagious diseases through a liaison office in Kaesong, on the northern side of the border. The agreement

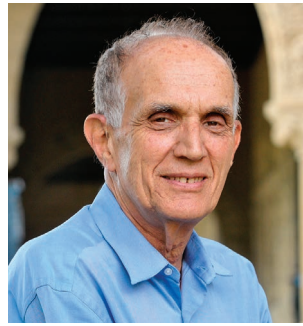
ROD SEARCEY

is part of a pledge to expand public-health collaboration, laid out in a declaration that South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un signed in Pyongyang on 19 September. The agreement is a necessary first step in planning for free movement between the Koreas, or for eventual reunification, says Shin Hee Young, a paediatric oncologist and director of the Institute for Health and Unification Studies at Seoul National University. Bacterial diseases, such as TB, rheumatic fever and scarlet fever, that are rampant in North Korea are much less common in South Korea, says Shin. “When these people cross the border without any restrictions, there will be an epidemic of tuberculosis in the South,” he says. More than 107,000 cases of TB were reported in North Korea in 2017, resulting in an estimated 16,000 deaths, according to the World Health Organization.

## AWARDS

## Stats ‘rock star’

US statistician Bradley Efron (pictured) at Stanford University in California has won the 2018 International Prize in Statistics for pioneering the ‘bootstrap’ method for measuring the



reliability of small data samples. His work, which dates back to 1977, has given rise to techniques now commonly used across many scientific disciplines. The American Statistical Association — which administers the prize together with four other scientific societies — announced the winner on 12 November. The US\$80,000 prize was first awarded in 2016 and is given out every two years; British statistician David Cox was its first winner. Efron, who is 80, says that he was “thrilled” to receive the prize. Scientists often have to wait many years to get their “round of applause”, he says. “It turns out that’s okay — it feels great!” Sally Morton, a statistician at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, says that Efron is “a statistical rock star”. “He has inspired generations of statisticians and scientists,” she says.

## POLITICS

## Call for Brexit vote

The parliament of Scotland has become the first UK legislative body to support a public vote on the final terms of any Brexit deal. The United Kingdom is scheduled to leave the European Union on 29 March 2019 and the government is seeking to finalize a withdrawal agreement, which must be approved by the UK parliament and EU member states. On 7 November, Scottish members of parliament voted to pass a motion on the threats that Brexit poses to Scotland’s science and research, which included an amendment calling for a ‘people’s vote’. Withdrawal negotiations have been criticized by many in and out of government as chaotic, and calls for a second public vote have surged in recent weeks. Scientists have repeatedly warned that Brexit could have a catastrophic effect on science and collaboration. Two days later, UK transport minister and former science minister Jo Johnson resigned from the government over the negotiations, and also called for a referendum on the terms of any deal — which he said should include

an explicit option for the United Kingdom to remain in the EU.

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## Nuclear-power vote

Hundreds of researchers in Taiwan have signed an open letter urging the public to vote to continue the phase-out of nuclear power in an upcoming referendum. Last year, Taiwanese legislators added a clause to the island’s electricity act to shut down all nuclear power plants by 2025. But many people disagree with the plan. This October, proponents of nuclear power gathered enough signatures — more than 1.5% of the electorate in Taiwan — to force a referendum that will ask the public to agree to removing the phase-out clause from the act. The vote will be held on 24 November, along with multiple other referendums and local elections. The researchers warn that Taiwan is at high risk of earthquakes and tsunamis — events that can damage nuclear-power stations with devastating effects — and doesn’t yet have a feasible long-term solution for dealing with the radioactive waste. The waste is currently stored at the power stations or on Orchid Island off the east coast.

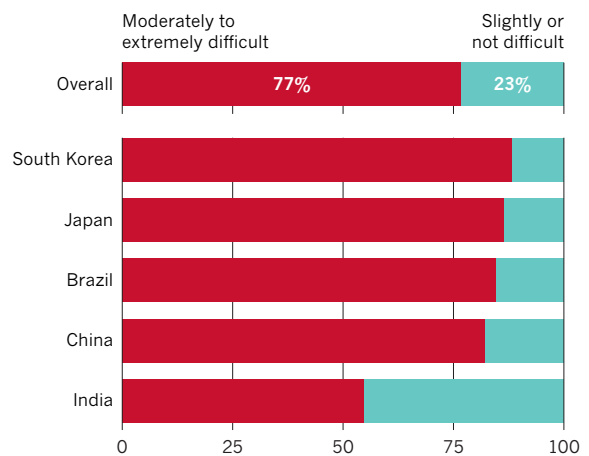
## TREND WATCH

More than two-thirds of researchers find it difficult to prepare manuscripts and respond to peer-review comments, finds a survey of nearly 7,000 researchers in 100 countries, released on 9 October. The issues might stem from language barriers, suggests the report. Some 70% of respondents were based in emerging scientific powerhouses: Brazil, China, India, Japan and South Korea. Only 11% had English as a first language, and 45% said that they found it difficult to write in English. The poll was carried out between December 2016 and January 2018 by Editage, a company based

in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that offers language-editing and publication support. Two-thirds of respondents who had authored papers felt that journal guidelines in general were unclear, incomplete or both, and three out of four said that preparing manuscripts in English was the most challenging part of publishing. The publishing industry needs to consider how to eliminate or minimize the extra burden on authors whose first language isn’t English, the report says. Otherwise, journals risk missing out on research because authors might choose to submit to regional-language publications.

## ENGLISH-LANGUAGE BARRIER

Researchers in major scientific nations often struggle to navigate publishing requirements in English-language journals. Many say they find it difficult to write and to prepare their manuscripts in English.



SOURCE: AUTHOR PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC PUBLISHING: GLOBAL SURVEY REPORT 2018; EDITAGE