Correspondence

Plan S to hit societies hard

Plan S is good news (*Nature* **561**, 17–18; 2018). As we move towards this subscription-free publishing model for 2020, the enormous costs that institutions pay to access the scientific literature will gradually be phased out. However, this could adversely affect the activities of academic societies that run their own journals.

These societies currently use income from subscription fees to host affordable conferences, run workshops, award travel grants, develop policy and engage in outreach. As publication charges for authors replace subscription fees, this income will plummet. Funding bodies might need to step in to make up the shortfall for supporting these services to the scientific community.

When publication charges become the norm, authors who cannot afford to pay them must not be unfairly disadvantaged (see J. Measey *Nature* **562**, 494; 2018). Means-tested rules for fee waivers will need to be factored in to the new publishing model.

Michael Jennions, **Rob Lanfear**
Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.
Shinichi Nakagawa *University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.*
s.nakagawa@unsw.edu.au

University voices in climate negotiations

Research institutions are appointed to act as official 'observer' delegates at international climate negotiations that are hosted by the United Nations and are otherwise closed to journalists and the outside world (see go.nature.com/2atycmq). As non-party stakeholders, they will provide a layer of transparency at this week's 24th annual Conference of the Parties session, for example. Thanks to the University Climate Delegation Coalition (UCDC) that we launched last year, these delegates are no longer simply observers: they can now bring a wide range of research voices to the table.

As knowledge producers, climate delegates from research institutions are in a position to provide insight into and attention to climate policy. The UCDC aims to engage delegates across US institutions on common initiatives. Over several months, researchers talk to their delegate representatives about their priorities for climate-related policy topics — for example, for emissions inventories, technology transfer, ecosystem management and human rights.

University delegations therefore provide an opportunity for the broader research community to connect with international climate negotiations and with climate advocacy.

Samantha Basile*, Michael Lerner* *University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.*
Keyon Rostamnezhad *Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.*
**Competing interests declared (see go.nature.com/2rcnrdb for details).*
sjbasile@umich.edu

Brazil politics threat to food security

Last month's 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity discussed the pressing issue of biodiversity conservation and its relation to food security. Brazil was a participant with a right to vote, although it had acted merely as an observer in negotiations on the 2010 Nagoya Protocol, which it had failed to ratify because of its agribusiness and other interests. In our view, Jair Bolsonaro's incoming government is likely to stand by those interests, despite the need to protect one of the world's most biodiverse countries (see also *Nature* **563**, 5–6; 2018).

The government now taking shape is committed to relaxing requirements for environmental licences and loosening environmental regulations. The newly appointed minister of agriculture has called for measures such as the 'pesticide package' (bill number 6.299/2002), which would weaken the criteria for pesticide approval — despite the concerns of United Nations rapporteurs Hilal Elver (on the right to food) and Baskut Tuncak (on toxins).

And, in a further blow to biodiversity, Bolsonaro has promised to open up the Amazon for agribusiness, with no indication that he intends to support traditional communities.

Marina Demaria Venâncio *Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil.*
Kamila Pope, **Stefan Sieber** *Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research, Müncheberg, Germany.*
popekamilla@gmail.com

Dynamic tolls are no easy traffic fix

Peter Cramton and colleagues suggest that dynamic road pricing could be a solution to traffic problems (*Nature* **560**, 23–25; 2018). As social scientists, we argue that getting drivers to change their behaviour might not be so simple, because the behaviour does not depend only on prices.

For instance, drivers tend to stick with their usual routes, departure times and destinations. Many would be reluctant to adapt their trips to a road-pricing scheme that fluctuates across time and place according to traffic conditions, because this requires too much mental effort. And charges would need to be prohibitively high to persuade them to give up the convenience, independence, flexibility, comfort and speed of using their cars.

Neither can public support for road pricing be assumed. It was blocked in Manchester (2005) and Edinburgh (2007) in the United Kingdom, in the Netherlands in 2010, and in Copenhagen in 2012. Pricing policies need to be seen as fair to be acceptable, which is more likely if they protect the environment and future generations. Such psychological motives are rarely considered in economic models and in public and policy debates.

More interdisciplinary research into the causes of traffic problems is necessary for designing socially feasible policy solutions. For example, public support could be grown by communicating the extent to which such schemes would meet their objectives and how drivers would benefit.

Geertje Schuitema *University College Dublin, Ireland.*
Linda Steg *University of Groningen, the Netherlands.*
geertje.schuitema@ucd.ie

Helmholtz mentored many luminaries

In addition to his own discoveries (see H. Schmidgen *Nature* **561**, 175; 2018), polymath Hermann von Helmholtz influenced the development of a whole group of illustrious physicists.

In 1879, for example, he advised his student Heinrich Rudolf Hertz to experimentally test the assumptions underlying James Clerk Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism. Hertz subsequently became the first to demonstrate the existence of electromagnetic waves, which eventually led to the radio and to telecommunications. Helmholtz's students and research associates also included Max Planck, Heinrich Kayser, Eugen Goldstein, Wilhelm Wien, Arthur König, Henry Augustus Rowland, Albert Abraham Michelson and Michael Pupin, several of whom went on to receive the Nobel prize.

Helmholtz's insights continue to be pertinent today (see, for example, S. A. Khan *Int. J. Light Electron Opt.* **127**, 9798–9809; 2016).

Sameen Ahmed Khan *Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman.*
rohelakhan@yahoo.com