

HUMAN FRONTIERS SCIENCE

Management issues settled

Tokyo

AN international council of scientists will have the biggest say in selecting the research objectives of Japan's Human Frontier Science Program. That is the most important outcome of discussions of the programme held last week in Tokyo by government representatives of the seven Western summit nations (Japan, Canada, France, West Germany, Italy, Britain and the United States) and the European Community.

Debate over the organizational structure of the programme was "heated", according to Toichi Sakata, director of the programme office at the Science and Technology Agency. But in the end, representatives accepted Japan's proposal that there should be a governing board of trustees consisting of government representatives to set basic policy and make final management decisions, an international council of scientists to set research objectives and organize a peer-review system for the award of grants and fellowships and a secretariat of administrators drawn from the summit nations. A particularly contentious issue was that of whether the board of trustees can override decisions of the council of scientists.

Finally, it was also agreed that "purely scientific decisions" by the council — for example, selection of research themes within the areas to be covered by the programme (the brain and molecular recognition and response) — cannot be overridden by the board, Sakata says. It was also decided at the meeting that, as the programme is developed, the council will be able to change research priorities and topics and initiate new lines of research provided that the board agrees.

The secretariat will be located in an office in Europe due to open this October, but the site is not yet decided. Three locations are under consideration: London, Strasbourg and Rome. The highly political decision on location will be made by consensus among the summit nations by late July or August when the final meeting to set up the Frontiers Program will be held, Sakata says.

The Science and Technology Agency and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry have a total of about \$20 million for the programme in this fiscal year (ending in March 1990). Twenty 3-year grants of \$0.5 million each and 100 2-year postdoctoral fellowships will be awarded to international teams of scientists from the summit nations. Ten workshops will also be held by the end of March. Solicitations for grant and fellowship applications will begin in August.

David Swinbanks

WHALING

Japan contemplates bigger kill

Washington

AN attempt by Japan to double the number of whales it will be allowed to kill this year failed when the International Whaling Commission (IWC) refused last week to consider a request for permission to kill whales in Japanese coastal waters. Japan asked that its traditional coastal whaling communities be exempt from the moratorium on commercial whaling on the grounds that Alaskan eskimos are already granted a similar exemption.

But the IWC postponed discussion of Japan's request to its next meeting, to be held in 1990 in The Netherlands. The moratorium will then be reconsidered in the light of the assessment of world whale populations now under way.

Japan was also refused a request for an interim allocation of 320 minke whales, which infuriated the Japanese representative, who said that more porpoises and small cetaceans would be killed instead. IWC members are divided over whether these animals should be within the council's remit, with Latin American countries arguing against it on the grounds that it would interfere with their sovereignty.

For the third consecutive year, the killing of whales for "scientific research" by Japan, Iceland and Norway was criticized by the IWC, although in language toned down from previous years: instead of asking governments not to grant permits for "scientific" whaling, IWC asks merely that they "reconsider".

IMAGE
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REASONS

Greenpeace/Morgan

Minke whale fishing on the deck of the Japanese ship Nisshin Maru 3.

ANIMAL RIGHTS PROTESTS

French researchers plan to hit back

Paris

RESEARCHERS from the Lyons laboratories raided by animal-rights activists last month (see *Nature* 339, 407; 8 June 1989) have decided to create an association to defend animal experimentation. The move follows what a communique describes as "a campaign of misinformation" in the media over the past few weeks.

Researchers, says the communique, are being portrayed as "Frankensteins", carrying out "cruel and senseless experiments". To correct this view, the association hopes to inform the press of the strict controls imposed by law to minimize animal suffering and to illustrate the importance of using animal models to understand fatal diseases such as cancer, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease. The association has invited a number of "prestigious personalities" and researchers to meet the press this week.

Meanwhile, a number of animal-rights groups stood in last weekend's European elections. One of their electoral bids is to "create an ethics committee to fight against vivisection and animal experimentation". Although they gained no seats in the European Parliament, they received about 180,000 votes.

Peter Coles

IWC adds that the only research that has any value in assessing and conserving the whale populations is that in which whales are not killed. But ignoring the criticisms, each of the countries concerned announced plans for more scientific research. Japan will take 400 minke whales this year, up from the previous 250. Norway will take 20 minke whales and Iceland will take 68 fin whales. The proposed kills were condemned by the IWC.

The World Wildlife Fund is now taking legal action against the United States for not imposing fishing sanctions against Iceland. Under the amendment, the United States can impose sanctions against countries failing to heed IWC limits.

New data on whale populations were presented at the meeting last week based on sightings south of latitude 60° S between 1978 and 1984. The blue whale population is now estimated at 200–1,100, compared with the 1965 estimate of 11,000.

The new estimate surprised the IWC scientific committee but a spokesman said that an explanation of the discrepancy will have to wait full analysis of the new data. The new estimate is based on sightings whereas previous estimates have been based on whalers' kill reports. An expected fin whale population of 100,000 was estimated at only about 2,000 but the spokesman said a large proportion of the fin whale population may be north of the area surveyed.

Christine McGourty