The year in review

Environmental research made the headlines in a big way this year. The value of this research to the UK economy was demonstrated repeatedly in a series of major reports. With our new stategy, NERC and partners are now putting in place the systems needed to provide solutions to the environmental challenges facing the UK in the coming decades.

This has been an important year for environmental research in the UK. The science has never had such a high profile. Two globally significant reports featured important inputs from scientists employed or funded by us: the Stern Review on the economics of climate change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report.

These reports pinpoint the scientific advances in climate change research as well as the remaining uncertainties. These and other authoritative reports, inform our new strategy *Next Generation Science for Planet Earth*, which we have been developing this year and, after external consultation, will unveil in the autumn. This sets out our science and organisational goals for the next five years. Examples of major new initiatives include *Oceans 2025*, our strategic marine science research programme and *Living with Environmental Change* (LWEC). We are developing LWEC, which will bring together a wide panorama of multidisciplinary science, with partners across research councils, government departments and industry.

During this year two major international projects were launched: International Polar Year and the African Monsoon Multidisciplinary Analysis (AMMA). The NERC-funded community has helped shape and drive both programmes and we confidently expect the research they produce to form the basis of future national and international policies.

The Princess Royal named NERC's new Royal Research Ship *James Cook* in February, following her visit to a British Antarctic Survey base in January. The new Minister for Science Malcolm Wicks also joined our scientists in Antarctica in February.

Researchers at Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory (POL) have been involved in designing and installing a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean. Closer to home, both POL and British Geological Survey researchers have looked at the tsunami risk to the UK. And scientists at Plymouth Marine Laboratory have discovered that marine algae could absorb significant amounts of carbon dioxide from power stations, providing another potentially commercially viable solution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

NERC held five events to celebrate and communicate the achievements of eight themed research programmes, which now draw to a close. Highlights from these programmes, reported here and in previous annual reports, include the first mapping of the underside of an ice shelf and evidence that it is possible to track atmospheric pollution on a transcontinental scale.

We take communicating the outcomes of NERC-funded scientific research very seriously. We held a lively event in January to talk with stakeholders about our science achievements over this year and discuss NERC's future priorities. We aim to hold more of these events. Our quarterly magazine *Planet Earth* won a national award – external magazine of the year 2006 – and, to engage with the public on environmental issues, we held an energetic web debate 'The Climate Change Challenge' which attracted sceptics from around the world.

This has been a year of major changes to NERC's senior management team. Our Chairman Sir Rob Margetts, who has been hugely influential during his six years in office, left in December. His leadership has been both tireless and selfless. He will be greatly missed. Our new Chairman Ed Wallis joined us in January and he is already making his mark. We have also welcomed five new Council Members: Paul Curran, Michael Lockwood, John Mitchell, Colin Paynter and Marjorie Wilson. David Falvey, director of the British Geological Survey (BGS), and Chris Rapley, director of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), both announced their retirement this year. They have been inspirational leaders and great assets to the NERC community. John Ludden joined us as the new director at BGS and Nick Owens, director of the Plymouth Marine Laboratory, takes over as the new director of BAS this summer. We welcome them and wish them every success.

Finally, we hope you are as inspired by the achievements of the UK environmental science community as we are. These achievements are only possible by the NERC-funded community working with key partner organisations in the UK and collaborating with colleagues from around the world. All that is left to say is congratulations to all scientists and supporting staff who have helped make this year so successful.

Ed Wallis, Chairman
Alan Thorpe, Chief Executive

Clockwise from top left:

Training Afghan geologists.

Ethiopia: the birth of an ocean.

Alan Thorpe, NERC Chief Executive.

Ed Wallis, Chairman.