

The year in review

Once again, the government's citation analysis has shown that the UK is second only to the USA in terms of total citations for published environmental research. The UK can rightly describe its environmental research community as 'world-class'.

This year has been one of special significance. In December 2007, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Many UK-based scientists, including those funded or employed by NERC, contributed to the IPCC fourth assessment report. The report's significance cannot be overstated: it will form the basis of global policy on this challenge for the next few decades.

We applaud and congratulate all those honoured by the committee and all the support staff in research centres and universities throughout the UK who helped make it possible.

A month earlier, in November, NERC launched its new strategy *Next Generation Science for Planet Earth, 2007–2012*. The IPCC report, the Stern Review on the economics of climate

change and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment helped shape the strategy, which recognises the urgent need to find solutions to the global environmental challenges threatening life on Earth.

A central part of *Next Generation Science for Planet Earth* is NERC's contribution to a £1 billion research/policy initiative *Living with Environmental Change*. This ten-year programme, supported by 17 organisations, signals a new approach to collaboration across the UK environmental science communities and beyond into other disciplines. It will bring together research councils, other funding bodies, industry and government departments and agencies from across the UK.

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The strategy launch coincided with the government's announcement of the Comprehensive Spending Review detailing the Science Budget allocation. NERC's allocation for the next three years represents a 5.4 per cent average annual increase. It includes a component to allow us to pay 80 per cent of the full economic cost associated with research grants in universities.* Allowing for the full economic cost, NERC's allocation was among the best across the research councils, reflecting the powerful case for investment in the science needed to address the environmental problems facing the planet.

Two major new facilities demonstrate NERC's commitment to collaboration: the Environment Centre Wales, a joint venture with Bangor University and the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology; and the new national high-performance computing facility in Edinburgh funded by the research councils. We have also created a new National Centre for Earth Observation to coordinate NERC's research with Earth observation satellites. In 2007, a satellite instrument developed from technology funded by NERC recorded the unprecedented loss of sea ice during the Arctic summer.

Closer to home, NERC scientists provided vital and timely information to operational agencies such as the Environment Agency and the Met Office during the summer floods, the two earthquakes that struck the UK, and the storm surge that threatened the east coast of England.

Amid all these strategic achievements, 2007-08 saw much inspirational research. A grant awarded to scientists at University College London for climate research relating



to water in Earth's atmosphere led to the discovery of water in the atmosphere of a planet in a solar system 63 light years away (page 16).

The world-class research contained in this document is further evidence for the government's citation analysis, which shows the UK to be second only to the USA in the number of citations published in environmental research – we can feel justly proud of this achievement. During 2007-08, a key priority has been improving the flow of this world-class research into policy and industry: grants must now contain a knowledge exchange component.

It has been an excellent year for NERC. Our new strategy and the allocation of funding for the next three years mean that we can look forward to rapidly advancing the science to address the challenge of sustaining life on Earth.

Ed Wallis, *Chairman*
Alan Thorpe, *Chief Executive*
30 June 2008



* 3.3 per cent increase excluding contribution for full economic cost.