

# Letters

## Environmental Science Agency: What Will It Become?

In an editorial entitled "Environmental sciences" (29 April 1966) Paul E. Klopsteg discusses some of the implications, as he sees them, of the establishment of the Environmental Science Services Administration (ESSA) within the Department of Commerce. Klopsteg is particularly concerned—because the term "environmental science" semantically can be extended to embrace all scientific activities relating to all aspects of man's surroundings—that ESSA may ultimately "assume responsibility for all science and technology in Government." He is also concerned that the cost of providing the nation with environmental science services will be "immeasurably greater" than before.

ESSA was created by the President last year under his authority to reorganize the executive branch of the federal government. In his message to the Congress, 13 May 1965, on the reorganization plan for the establishment of ESSA, President Johnson forcefully stated the intended mission of ESSA and the benefits that would flow from the plan:

The new Administration will provide a single national focus for our efforts to describe, understand, and predict the state of the oceans, the state of the lower and upper atmosphere, and the size and shape of the earth.

Establishment of the Administration will mark a significant step forward in the continual search by the Federal Government for better ways to meet the needs of the Nation for environmental science services. The organizational improvements made possible by the reorganization plan will enhance our ability to develop an adequate warning system for the severe hazards of nature—for hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, and seismic sea waves, which have proved so disastrous to the Nation in recent years. These improvements will permit us to provide better environmental information to vital segments of the Nation's economy—to agriculture, transportation, communications, and industry, which continually re-

quire information about the physical environment. They will mean better services to other Federal departments and agencies—to those that are concerned with the national defense, the exploration of outer space, the management of our mineral and water resources, the protection of the public health against environmental pollution, and the preservation of our wilderness and recreation areas.

The new Administration will bring together a number of allied scientific disciplines that are concerned with the physical environment. This integration will better enable us to look at man's physical environment as a scientific whole and to seek to understand the interactions among air, sea, and earth and between the upper and lower atmosphere.

In addition to permitting more effective management within the Department of Commerce, the new organization will ultimately produce economies. These economies will be of two types. The first, and probably the most significant, is the savings and avoidance of costs which will result from the sharing of complex and expensive facilities such as satellites, computers, communication systems, aircraft, and ships. These economies will increase in significance as developments in science and technology bring into being still more advanced equipment. Second, integration of the existing headquarters and field organizations will permit more efficient utilization of existing administrative staffs and thereby produce future economies.

I think it is clear from the President's words that ESSA has a carefully defined role. While ESSA's mission is purposefully broad—to look at man's total geophysical environment—it is also a delimited one. ESSA was not created, and cannot extend itself, to embrace all of science and technology. I think it is equally clear that ESSA will permit the federal government to make more efficient use of the federal science dollar.

ROBERT M. WHITE

*Environmental Science Services  
Administration, Washington, D.C.*

My esteem for White makes me respect and value his comments. Regretfully, my reading them requires me to say that his assurance about the carefully defined role of ESSA has not greatly eased the concern expressed

in the editorial. Perhaps my continuing skepticism stems from my having learned to recognize the standard pattern of empire-building in government during the years when I occupied a seat near the front row as an observer of Washington bureaucracy.

In the light of experience one cannot be profoundly impressed by the President's message which accompanied the Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1965. The effect of such a message is ephemeral, written as it is in the flush of enthusiasm over an idea newly advanced. Under pressures of building an organization toward competence in dealing with problems and attaining stated objectives, including "status" among the agencies, critical reappraisal of functions and adoption of desirable restrictions are unlikely, much less a containment of expansionism. Undoubtedly the message was highly effective salesmanship by which the Congress was persuaded not to give the Plan the kind of going-over which is given either a House or Senate bill of the usual kind, but rather to let the 60 days pass without raising objections. Thus the Plan became law without a voice having been raised against it.

Since ESSA's inception, when it included the Weather Bureau, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and a few months later the Central Radio Propagation Laboratory (now The Institute for Telecommunication Sciences and Aeronomy), there have been added: the National Environmental Data Service, the National Environmental Satellite Center, the Institutes for Environmental Research, the Institute for Atmospheric Sciences, the Institute for Oceanography, and the Institute for Earth Sciences. This may not be all-inclusive, or evidence of a tendency to expand, but it does appear that the stage is set, with such an array of new bureaus, for conflict with existing bureaus of other agencies having responsibilities in science and technology. Competition for appropriations as well as for performance of public service functions seems unavoidable. Indeed, competition of sorts with the Reclamation Service and the Geological Survey has already been reported.

Let us hope that White's eventual successors will be as conscientious as he is, and will exercise restraint as he does, in keeping the functions and activities of ESSA well circumscribed.

PAUL E. KLOPSTEG

*828 Apple Tree Lane, Glenview, Illinois*