# International Biological Program Suffers Another Setback

The floundering American effort to participate in the International Biological Program (IBP), an ambitious ecological research project involving more than 50 nations, ran into further problems at a congressional hearing early this month. Testifying for the Johnson administration, Ivan L. Bennett, Jr., deputy director of the Office of Science and Technology (OST), opposed a proposal to grant American IBP organizers $5 million in federal financing for fiscal year 1969. He expressed certain reservations about the progress of the program, but his main point seemed to be that, in a year of great budgetary strain, the IBP had not fully established its claim to the limited federal resources available to support research and development.

The administration's opposition brought sharp outcries from American IBP officials. W. Frank Blair, chairman of the U.S. National Committee for the IBP, cited the "real possibility of a loss of momentum" and warned that continuation of present funding arrangements could prove "disastrous" for the IBP.

However, federal science officials who testified at the hearing before the House subcommittee on science, research, and development, chaired by Emilio Q. Daddario (D–Conn.), dismissed the possibility that the IBP will be irreparably damaged. Indeed, they seemed more concerned about larger problems resulting from fiscal restraints imposed throughout the government than about the IBP. As Bennett expressed it: "My worry is about the loss of momentum in the whole scientific community and it far outweighs my individual worries about the loss of momentum in this particular program. I don't deny the possible loss of momentum, but I think there is a loss of momentum in almost our entire academic research effort. . . ."

The American IBP effort, which is run by a committee appointed by the National Academy of Sciences, has been troubled since its inception by a number of administrative and funding problems that have caused the program to lag behind the scheduled worldwide starting date of July 1967 (News and Comment, 22 Mar., p. 1331). However, in March, the American program got an apparent boost forward when the Daddario subcommittee, which had previously held hearings on the IBP, urged greater federal and private support for the program on the grounds that IBP deals with "one of the most crucial situations to face this or any civilization—the immediate or near potential of man to damage, perhaps beyond repair, the ecological system of the planet on which all life depends." Subsequently a resolution was introduced in the House authorizing a $5 million appropriation to the National Science Foundation in fiscal year 1969 to support the IBP. The 1969 NSF budget currently earmarks only $700,000 for IBP, though NSF hopes to offer additional support to the IBP from its normal research funds. The resolution also committed the federal government to support IBP for 4 succeeding years.

In opposing the resolution, Bennett stressed that "OST's support for U.S. participation in the IBP has not waned during the past year." But he suggested that American IBP officials could profitably use more time for planning, and he asserted that they have not fully explored the possibility of gaining support from various federal "mission" agencies. "It is our conclusion that as important as IBP may eventually prove to be in our national interests, the program has not yet been sufficiently developed to warrant large-scale special funding during fiscal year 1969, particularly in the prevailing fiscal situation," Bennett said.

Philip Handler, chairman of NSF's National Science Board, questioned whether the IBP can achieve the rather grandiose goals that have come to be associated with it. The IBP focuses on biological studies relating either to productivity and human welfare, or to the rapid changes taking place in environments throughout the world. Its most outspoken supporters, including the Daddario subcommittee, have suggested it represents at least a start toward solving a host of pressing problems caused by man's fouling of his environment. But Handler questioned whether the IBP will be able to produce "the equivalent of an ecological assets and liabilities statement as well as a profit and loss statement, as it were, which will reflect what you are doing to those assets and liabilities in an ecological sense." Handler also argued that it would be "unwise" to earmark $5 million for the IBP "in a year in which there may be severe blows to the [National Science] Foundation's other aspirations." Leland J. Haworth, NSF director, endorsed the IBP, but on the question of specific financing, he deferred to the belt-tightening judgment of the Bureau of the Budget and OST.

Thus the immediate prospects for substantial IBP funding remain gloomy. It seems unlikely that a Congress striving to cut projected budget deficits will give much consideration to additional support for the IBP, especially when the executive branch opposes the additional funding. IBP planners say they could usefully use $7.5 million in fiscal 1969 and that the current $700,000 line item is grossly inadequate. Additional funds are expected to be contributed by the mission agencies from their 1969 research budgets, but the amount is uncertain, particularly in a tight budget year.

Meanwhile, federal budget and science officials have agreed that NSF will conduct a special study of the progress and funding needs of the IBP for submission in conjunction with NSF's budget request for fiscal year 1970 (which starts 1 July 1969). The outcome of that study, coupled with the overall fiscal situation for 1970, will determine whether IBP gets substantial special funding next year.—PHILIP M. BOFFEY