LETTERS

Deep-Sea Drilling

Deborah Shapley's report "Law of the sea meeting: A wet blanket for ocean research" (News and Comment, 14 Sept., p. 1024) was most interesting but told only part of the story.

The spokesmen for the American scientific community have weakened their prospects for a sensible regime for ocean research by their insistence on unlimited freedom. There is nothing sacrosanct about a research vessel. It is just as capable of polluting the seas or creating a hazard to navigation as any ordinary vessel. Moreover, the *Glomar Challenger* has demonstrated a capability to reenter the drill hole in the ocean floor with fresh drill bits that would enable it to strike oil or gas in deep waters. At the same time it has no capability to prevent blowouts comparable to that required of commercial operators. This means that a research vessel could possibly cause a blowout of such disastrous proportions as to pale the Santa Barbara blowout by comparison. Yet, the spokesmen for the American scientific community have persisted in their quest for total freedom from coastal nation control over scientific research beyond a narrow territorial sea.

The U.S. government, in its initial position in the United Nations Seabed Committee, went along with this view and worded its proposed draft of an international seabed treaty of 3 August 1970 accordingly. One need only visualize the reaction of the good citizens of Santa Barbara to word from Washington that neither the federal government nor their own local or state government had any power whatever to prevent a foreign counterpart of the *Glomar Challenger* from proceeding with a deep-sea drilling experiment in the Santa Barbara Channel just beyond the 12-mile limit to appreciate that this position had to be modified—as the U.S. delegation has now done—in the light of our own national interest and that of other coastal nations.

The 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf, in a clause incorporated into article 5 of the treaty, reportedly with the active support of the United States, prescribes that

> 8. The consent of the coastal State shall be obtained in respect of any research concerning the continental shelf and undertaken there. Nevertheless, the coastal State shall not normally withhold its consent if the request is submitted by a qualified institution with a view to purely scientific research into the physical or biological characteristics of the continental shelf, subject to the proviso that the coastal State shall have the right, if it so desires, to participate or to be represented in the research, and that in any event the results shall be published.

The scientific community has, at times, admittedly had serious difficulties obtaining the consent required by this clause or the comparable consent required by nonadherents to the Geneva convention under customary international law. These difficulties provide a solid basis for seeking meaningful modification of the quoted language. They do not, however, provide a basis for its complete elimination.

The American Bar Association (ABA) has taken a constructive approach to this important problem in the resolution on the natural resources of the sea adopted at its last annual meeting on 6 August 1973. In the portion of this resolution dealing with scientific research, the ABA

> (12) SUPPORTS the general principle of freedom of scientific research, but recognizes the right of coastal States, within internationally agreed guidelines designed to provide the maximum practicable application of this principle, to impose reasonable restrictions on activities on their continental margins which will entail threats to their national security or hazards to the environment, as by drilling into the seabed.

The end result of the international negotiations now under way is much more likely to be palatable to the American scientific community if its spokesmen will support this sensible approach to the problem and work with the U.S. delegation for its effective implementation.

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Nitrites in Foods

A. E. Wasserman and I. A. Wolff, who discuss the use of nitrate in their reply to P. H. Schuck and H. Wellford (Letters, 29 June, p. 1322), do not deal adequately with the question of the use of nitrite in cured meat and fish products, which Schuck and Wellford suggest is an unnecessary hazard to health. Wasserman and Wolff also ignore the problem of formation of carcinogenic nitrosamines in vivo (*1*), which Schuck and Wellford address in their letter. It is this amply