

Congress Reincarnates Stratton Commission on Oceans

The Senate has launched a major project on the future of national oceans policy which is expected to generate key legislative reform proposals in the next 3 to 4 years.

The National Ocean Policy Study, as it is called, will have no less than 33 senators on its guiding committee, will be headed by the Senate's principal ocean enthusiast Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.), and was set up by its other ocean champion, Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.), chairman of the Commerce Committee. The project has added special staff to the Commerce Committee staff. Three of Congress's research organizations are already working on studies to be used by the project: the Office of Technology Assessment, the General Accounting Office (GAO), and the Library of Congress.

The massive project is likely to become a formidable lobby for ocean affairs and marine science—particularly as these programs come into competition with those dealing with energy and food. Staffers on the project concede that it is, in legislative guise, a reincarnation of the 1967 Stratton Commission, headed by Julius C. Stratton, former chairman of the board of the Ford Foundation. The Stratton Commission proved to be the driving force behind several ocean initiatives of the late 1960's, including the proposals which led to the creation, in 1970, of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Staffers insist that the Hollings-Magnuson project will not produce a report—as the Stratton Commission did after 18 hectic months of effort. Instead, "We plan to be more action oriented," explained one. As studies are generated by GAO and the other groups, they will be circulated, along with draft legislation deriving from their conclusions, to the 33-member guiding committee. Since this committee includes not only the 18 senators on the Commerce Committee but at least 2 more from each of the seven other committees with a stake in ocean affairs, any bill approved by the Hollings-Magnuson committee is likely to be a shoo-in for Senate passage.

Jurisdictional Fight Looms

Sources close to the new project say its major fight will be a jurisdictional one. When Congress approves the merger of NOAA with a new Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR), one question which will arise will be whether NOAA will still be able to preserve its quasi-autonomous status. NOAA now reports to the Commerce Committee—which makes Hollings and Magnuson very happy. Most of DENR, however, will probably report to the Senate Interior Committee, which is chaired by Magnuson's powerful colleague from Washington, Democratic Senator Henry Jackson. Presumably one battle the Hollings-Magnuson oceans group will face then is how to keep NOAA, and ocean policy generally, under their jurisdiction when Jackson expands his Senate empire to include DENR.

Hollings has only just announced the near-complete list of the 33 members—yet the project is already active. The GAO is performing an agency-by-agency study of how ocean affairs are administered and financed, and

is on the lookout for overlaps, gaps, and poor overall performance. GAO's report, which is due in about 2 months, is expected to lead to some legislative recommendations. The Library of Congress, in addition, has begun a study trying to put a monetary value on coastal recreational and fishing resources, so that the senators will have some dollar figures to work with when the oil and natural gas exploitation issue comes before them. Finally, the Office of Technology Assessment in May convened a panel of experts who are producing a short-term report on offshore oil and gas policy.

The Hollings-Magnuson project is a rather blatant result of Senate dissatisfaction with the Nixon Administration's neglect of ocean affairs and the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) tendency to short-change ocean projects. Aside from establishing NOAA, which the Administration was pressured to do largely as a result of the groundwork in Congress laid by the Stratton Commission, Nixon's government has shown little enthusiasm for ocean matters.

Chief among the battles between the Hollings-Magnuson project and the Administration will be the question of the Coastal Zone Management Act, which was signed into law in 1972 but which the Administration had refused to fund. The OMB has argued that coastal policy should be part of land-use policy administration; coherent land-use planning would be the government's responsibility only when the land-use legislation, now stalled in the House, is passed. Ocean policy advocates, however, maintain that coastal zone management, which would involve everything from resort development to offshore oil, should be given priority on its own merits.

There are signs that the executive branch is taking the Hollings-Magnuson project seriously. The executive's coordinating group, the Interagency Committee on Marine Science and Engineering, headed by NOAA chief Robert M. White, has set up a new committee of the whole called the Select Committee on the Ocean Policy Study, or SCOPS, which is to do nothing but respond to the Hollings-Magnuson group's requests and comment on recommendations which affect more than one agency.

Scientists Involved

Behind the scenes in the project can be traced the influence of Edward Wenk, Jr., of the University of Washington, who has lobbied since the 1950's for more priority for marine affairs (*Science*, 17 November 1972) and who is clearly dissatisfied with the Nixon Administration's neglect of his favorite subject. As for participation by other scientists, the project plans to appoint a formal outside advisory committee of about 15 members; it will include scientists, industry representatives, state and local officials, and others. A list of names for the advisory committee has yet to be announced, but Commerce Committee staffers add that most of the advice will have to be solicited by mail since the project's meager \$200,000 budget will hardly pay for the advisers to travel to Washington.—DEBORAH SHAPLEY