



PC.

KW

CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-270 0259

From John W Fairclough FEng
Chief Scientific Adviser

W0287

Professor Sir David Phillips
Advisory Board for the Research Councils
Department of Education and Science
Elizabeth House
York Road
London SE1 7PH

21 November 1989

Dear David,

minutes attached

INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH (GER)

As you know it was agreed at the E(ST)(O) meeting on 9 November that the Cabinet Office would consider the coordination of science and policy aspects of current Government activities related to the environment. David Fisk (DOE) undertook to come back with proposals on arrangements for Science Base activities in GER. His letter of 10 November is a most helpful contribution to the identification of a way forward.

I said at the meeting that I would be seeking further discussion with those involved in the Inter-Agency proposal. I think it would be useful to set out what I see as the key principles involved and to highlight some of the problems which need to be addressed.

We should not limit ourselves to considerations of climate or climate change although that is where the current emphasis lies.

We should avoid confusion of roles, as far as possible. We should separate concerns of policy responsibility which lie with Departments of State, from the identification and execution of an agreed research programme. In other words, I think that we need to identify and to separate the customer and contractor roles, though I realise that the research councils are both customers for research and contractors to others.

I share the unease expressed at E(ST)(O) about the terms of reference and membership of the proposed Inter-Agency Committee. Instead of the Inter-Agency Committee I propose that we use two mechanisms to coordinate the main sets of players.

First, responsibility for science policy and the support of policy-led research lies with departments. I therefore propose to use E(ST)(O) to clarify overall requirements and to identify

gaps and overlaps; it will, of course, link with the broader policy discussion. I expect to have meetings of chief scientists from time to time to deal with questions in detail.

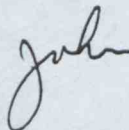
Secondly, I would favour a more efficient overarching structure than the proposed Inter-Agency Committee, with an underlying network of active scientists. I believe that much of this network is already in place. My preference would be a committee comprising the HORCs, the DG of the Meteorological Office, a governmental representative (recognising that the lead in government on environmental issues lies with DOE), under an independent chairman appointed by DES. The key task of the committee should be to identify an agreed annual programme of work to take account of broad policy guidance and to agree responsibilities for carrying it through. To do this it may be necessary to establish sub-groups to cover the main fields including modelling, process studies and impact studies.

Judgements about what is supported by the Science Base and the balance between the main fields must continue to be made by the ABRC and research councils according to the accepted criteria including excellence, timeliness, pervasiveness and applicability. Clearly, such a process with the identification of priorities will uncover work which cannot be done because of resource constraints, be they financial, manpower or equipment; and reveal gaps in the research agenda which will need to be progressed through established mechanisms.

I therefore hope that you and the HORCs will consider further the composition and terms of reference of the proposed new body. I appreciate that there has already been considerable discussion about an Inter-Agency Committee and I understand that HORCs will again consider this at a meeting later this month. However, the debate at E(ST)(O) revealed considerable unease with the proposal as presently constructed and further consideration has emphasised these doubts. My concern is that we should arrive at a sensible structure with appropriate communication channels and clear lines of responsibility.

I should be happy to expand on any of the points in this letter which I am copying to members of E(ST)(O).

Yours sincerely,



JOHN W FAIRCLOUGH