

U.S. Lags in Ocean Plans

► THE UNITED STATES continues to drag its heels in the ocean, while dreaming of the stars.

The nation continues to fall behind in development and application of knowledge about the oceans, at a time when land-locked Russia has risen to surpass Great Britain and Japan as an oceanographic power, and now occupies a powerful position in the world—second only to the United States.

However, present U.S. Government efforts in oceanography are meager: a severely watered-down bill to establish a temporary National Oceanographic Council, and a two-month-late excuse for a fiscal 1967 national oceanographic program, which fills 107 pages with little more than a confusing plethora of agencies and their overlapping activities.

At present, oceanographic developments of the United States are loosely gathered under one ineffectual National Oceanographic Program, headed by the Interagency Committee on Oceanography (ICO) of the Federal Council for Science and Technology. This committee was set up in 1960 to "coordinate" activities of the many complex agencies engaged in oceanography, but so far it merely keeps listings:

There are, for instance, eight Federal agencies, including the Coast Guard, the U.S. Navy and the Army's Corps of Engineers. The Department of the Interior has several departments active in oceanography: the Geological Survey and the Bureaus of Mines, Commercial Fisheries and Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare is involved in the vast wet field with its Federal Water Pollution Control Administration in the Public Health Service. Also included in ocean affairs are the Atomic Energy Commission, the Smithsonian Institution and the National Science Foundation, which encompasses many interested universities, colleges and other nongovernment institutions. This list does not include the large industries that are building research vehicles, equipment and instruments for ocean research.

Many proposals have been made to coordinate all these agencies into one strong and unified program or agency—a "wet NASA," as it has been called—or even to update and strengthen the six-year-old Interagency Committee on Oceanography. But these ideas have been drowned with arguments from powerful people in government and the military forces who state that such a new agency would be "unnecessary" because it would only duplicate existing programs and place additional demands on Federal funds.

Bills have been introduced in Congress from time to time—more than

a dozen bills last year—to coordinate the U.S. oceanographic program. As yet none of these bills has surfaced enough to become a reality.

A considerably modified and severely changed bill, S 944, will soon be set before Congress to establish a temporary National Oceanographic Council at cabinet level, with the Vice President of the United States as chairman. This bill would set up the Council for about four years, at which time the Council will be dissolved, leaving the President of the United States with the power to carry out plans for oceanographic research.

Scientists in oceanography do not think this weak bill will help the muddled situation.

Another evidence of the vague and frustrating lack of direction is the past use of valuable deep ocean research vessels and funds for such nonresearch projects as finding the H-bomb dropped off the coast of Spain, and the search for the submarine Thresher in 1963.

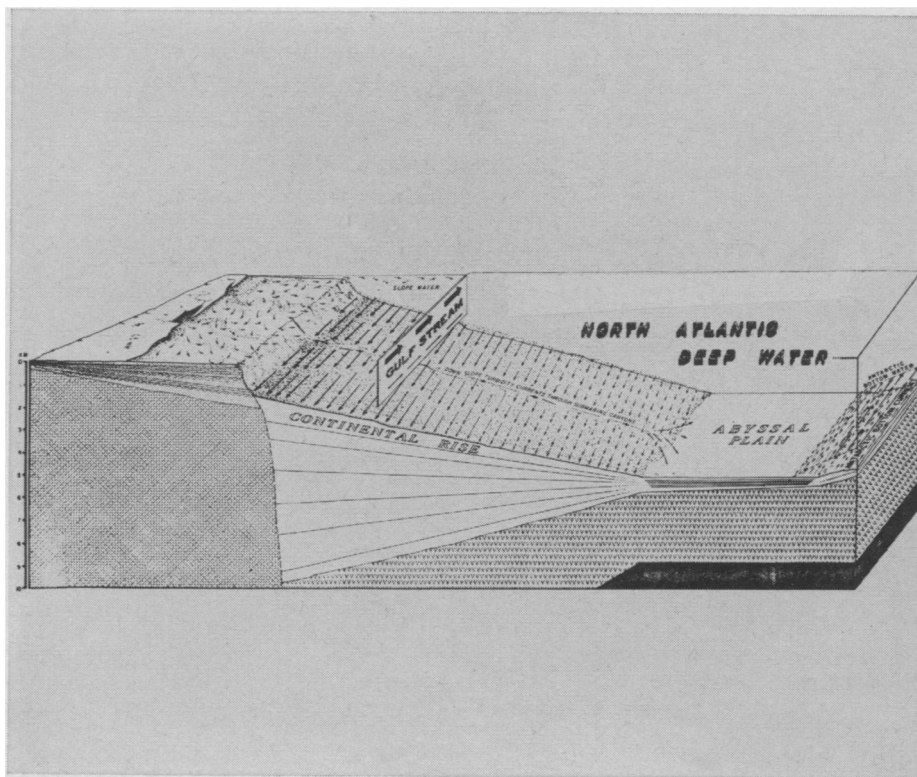
Withdrawing vessels, men and funds from research and putting them on these salvage details, important as they are, has cost the U.S. valuable time in pushing ahead in ocean research, scientists think. Particularly inexcusable is the case of the bathyscaphe

Trieste which was withdrawn from deepsea research in the Pacific in 1963 to search for the Thresher and has never been returned to research.

Even though the recently released report on fiscal 1967, put out by the ICO, was ready for distribution two months ago, it was held up so that it could be announced by the White House, with an accompanying letter from the President.

When it finally was released, it turned out to be a listing of many relatively small separate programs proposed for the fiscal year, without any cohesive driving force. The new nuclear-powered research vehicle, the NR-1, is described capable of inspecting all of the world's continental ocean shelves for weeks at a time without surfacing. Other new instruments and equipment listed include such things as electronic systems for measuring ocean tides, currents, temperatures and topography of the ocean floors. Continual studies will be made on such items as the origin and drift of polar ice, the structure of sea volcanoes, the energy flow between the sea and air. The Sealab's experiment to set man working and living in the sea will also be continued. Investigations will be strengthened to enable more accurate long-range weather forecasts, and to examine the use of shore waters for waste disposal, for recreation and as a source of valuable sea foods.

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CONTINENTAL RISE—The diagram shows how the formation of the continental rise occurred through sediments distributed by southward-moving ocean currents according to a new theory announced by Dr. Bruce Heezen of the Lamont Geological Observatory at the UNESCO Second International Oceanographic Congress.