

SELECT COMMITTEE

No Change for NERC

THE view that everything to do with the Natural Environment Research Council is as it should be was restated last week when three officials of the council gave evidence for the second time to the subcommittee of the Select Committee on Science and Technology. In particular, the officials said, they are satisfied with the scope of their responsibilities for oceanography, meteorology and hydrology.

So far, at least, NERC seems to have resisted the temptation, supported to some extent by logic and to some extent by the recommendations of previous committees, to take fisheries research under its wing.

Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards, chairman of NERC, said that although the work of the laboratories at Lowestoft and Aberdeen would fit well under NERC's umbrella, there were other reasons for keeping the present connexion of the laboratories with the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. For one thing, he said, fisheries research is international and there is a need to collaborate with other organizations on a governmental level in countries overseas. The subcommittee last week wanted to know what had happened to the recommendation of the Trend Committee in 1963 that the position of fisheries research should be reviewed five years after the setting up of NERC—a blessed event going back four years. But, as it happens, the council has not yet officially considered what should be done and has not even replied to the Council for Scientific Policy, which has asked for the views of NERC on the present arrangements. No doubt the council, which has often been accused of empire-building in the recent past, is particularly pleased with this evidence of self-restraint. The council, through its deputy secretary, Mr D. J. McLean, also said last week that it considers the small amount

of its resources devoted to meteorology—roughly 0.3 per cent of all expenditure—to be well spent. The money goes to a few universities with high reputations which are doing fundamental work, particularly in cloud physics. Mr McLean said that this usefully complements the work of the Meteorological Office, with which it would be hard for the universities to compete. NERC seems to have spent its money mostly at Oxford, Manchester and Newcastle upon Tyne; Mr McLean said that meteorology is necessarily expensive because of the facilities which it requires.

Hydrology should grow fast in the years ahead. NERC sees what used to be the small research unit under the now defunct Department of Scientific and Industrial Research growing to a large and important organization in its new incarnation as the Institute of Hydrology. The intention is that this should have a staff of between eighty and ninety and that it should spend half as much again as it does now. Pollution seems to be the subcommittee's favourite problem, but Professor Wynne-Edwards pointed out last week the distinction between research into existing pollution and research into methods for preventing pollution. Prevention, he said, is none of NERC's responsibility. Mr McLean also did his best to reassure the subcommittee that effort was not being wasted unduly on projects overseas. The teams sent to investigate problems abroad often learned much that would be valuable at home and many hydrological problems of a fundamental character could be answered more effectively in a more extreme climate. And in any case, NERC does not spend very much overseas.

From the examination of NERC so far carried out by the subcommittee, it is unlikely that the other research councils have much to fear from its operations. The parliamentarians seem to have been chiefly concerned to find out what the council is attempting to do with its resources. So far, there has been only the most cursory examination of the way in which the council manages its internal affairs.

Parliament in Britain**Planning and Management**

REPLYING to a question about the shortage of places for postgraduate students wanting to study planning and management, Mrs S. Williams, for the Department of Education and Science, said that the number of grants for these subjects was one of several questions about the transfer of postgraduate grants from local to central government covered in recent correspondence between the chairman of the Social Sciences Research Council and the department. She said she saw no reason to publish this correspondence but added that the National Economic Development Office, the Town Planning Institute and individuals had made representations and she hoped to reach a decision soon about the number of postgraduate awards for the social sciences.

Mrs Williams dismissed as unhelpful a suggestion that because of continued disorders at universities, the department should seek powers to provide for their

proper government. (Oral and written answers April 28.)

Sea Bed Exploitation

THE Government favours establishing an international regime to govern the exploration and exploitation of the deep sea bed as soon as practicable, but Mr F. Mulley, for the Foreign and Colonial Office, said he did not expect the United Nations Sea-Bed Committee to reach an early conclusion. Mr Mulley added that the Government accepts and supports the principle that there should be an arms control for the sea-bed; it is the practical details of arms control that are the stumbling block to rapid international agreement. (Oral answer, April 28.)

Academics' Wages

ON May 1 Mrs S. Williams announced that the Government, while accepting the recommendation of the Prices and Incomes Board that the pay of university teachers should in part reflect their teaching ability, had decided to cut by two-thirds the amount to be given as merit awards to non-professorial staff. The