

JOURNAL OF HYDROLOGY

NEW ZEALAND

Published twice annually by the New Zealand Hydrological Society

Volume 11

1972

Number 1

EDITORIAL

The Purpose and Effect of Recent Legislative Changes

Parliament has passed the No. 2 Amendment Act 1972 to the Water and Soil Conservation Act 1967. The Amendment Act abolishes the Water Pollution Control Council (formerly the Pollution Advisory Council) and the Water Allocation Council and combines their functions and duties in the newly created Water Resources Council.

An initial perusal of the No. 2 Amendment Act might lead to the view that, so far as hydrological research is concerned, little has been altered, but a closer consideration shows that important changes in this field have been made.

Sections 14(2)(a) and (b) of the Waters Pollution Act 1953 required the former Pollution Advisory Council to "carry out surveys and investigations for the purpose of ascertaining the causes, nature and extent of the pollution of waters; organize and encourage research into ways and means of preventing or reducing the pollution of waters". The National Water and Soil Conservation Authority has always construed the Waters Pollution Act 1953 as imposing these obligations upon the Council constituted by that Act, and though it had a general supervisory duty under its own Act, it hesitated to impose a regulatory function over the Pollution Advisory Council in this field. The Authority formerly had in fact little, if any, power in respect of water quality research. Though the 1953 Act constituting the Council refers to surveys and investigations, the absence of wide research in the field of pollution control by the Authority and the Organization constituted by the Water and Soil Conservation Act 1967 may indicate the diffidence of the Authority to impose its views arbitrarily on the Council.

As a consequence of last year's No. 2 Amendment Act, section 14(4)(k) now requires the Authority (in reference to hydrological research) to consider not only the quantity but also the quality of water, and accordingly of water resources in all their multifarious aspects.

That the National Authority means business is evidenced by the fact that it has already approved the establishment, under the aegis of the Ministry of Works, of a centralized water quality laboratory in the New Zealand Hydrological Services Depot in Christchurch, and of subsidiary laboratories in each district unit of the hydrological survey.

Pure research is, however, not all that is required. Section 14(4)(a) of the 1967 Act ("to organize the establishment of records of availability, volume and location of resources of natural water") now applies to the quality of water. The way is accordingly now open for the establishment of a central system for the storage of data relating to water quality. The Ministry of Works has for some time operated such a system in respect of the quantity of natural water, and the institution of a water quality system will benefit all persons and bodies concerned in this field, in particular Regional Water Boards.

Though the 1972 No. 2 Amendment Act might appear to impose further responsibilities on the Ministry of Works and to increase its hydrological activities to cope with this new task, the Ministry, in gaining more expertise in the area of water quality, will be in a much better position technologically to advise the National Authority on the encouragement and promotion of research in this and other agencies under the control of the Ministry.

The National Authority will not take its newly defined duties lightly. The country in general, and in particular all those intimately connected with the sphere of hydrology, are firmly assured that the Authority will see to it that research on water quality will dominate the general research programme. Our water resources will be the more efficiently applied when they can be used for multiple purposes before final discharge to river or sea, where of course the classification of these sections of our natural water supplies will be strictly enforced — but all this depends on the continued maintenance of quality at an acceptable level.

The programme now in implementation will involve complex but necessary research, aimed at preserving the natural waters of New Zealand in a state which should be the envy of an increasingly polluted world.

N. T. GILLESPIE

Deputy Chairman

National Water and Soil Conservation Authority