

OLD WORLD

Water Council Decried

THE National Water Council—the proposed central point of the government's reorganization of the water services in Britain—came under renewed attack last week from the Water Resources Board in its ninth annual report. The bill to bring the changes into effect is due for publication this week.

Since the proposals in December 1971 to merge the twenty-nine existing river authorities and 1,350 drainage and sewerage authorities into ten large Regional Water Authorities, the Water Resources Board has repeatedly approved of the scheme's objects but condemned its methods in that no provision is made for a strong central body to control the activities of the water authorities. The Water Resources Board was one of the first to champion the theory that water services should be dealt with by a few large bodies with wide powers, rather than by many small bodies with limited interests, and Sir William Goode, the board's chairman, reiterates in the report that "this proposal is right and we welcome and support it".

But the board still believes, Sir William says, that a national water authority is needed to formulate and execute national water policy, subject to ministerial direction, to oversee and direct the authorities, to allocate capital investment, to run long-term planning and research and development and to promote major works such as the estuary storage schemes currently under consideration.

At present, the only central body proposed is a National Water Council which "will not in our view be equipped to do what needs to be done at the centre in the coming years".

The National Water Council will have the ten chairmen of the authorities as *ex officio* members and will also have coopted experts, but there are no provisions for an expert permanent staff such as that of the Water Resources Board. A central planning unit will be situated in the Department of the Environment, reporting to the minister and the council, but the Water Resources Board feels that such a unit will have divided loyalties.

The board is also critical of the proposals for the industry's research centre. The centre will not include the Water Pollution Research Laboratory, the only centre in Britain concentrating on water pollution work. The board argues that the laboratory should be

involved, together with the existing Water Research Association and with "the relevant parts" of the Water Resources Board. It should be governed and funded by the National Water Council.

But the board's objections are likely to go unheeded with publication of the bill so near. A change of heart at this stage is unlikely.

EURATOM

Decision in February

LAST week's meeting to discuss the European Commission's five year plan for Euratom produced the perennial deadlock that seems to haunt so many European cooperative ventures.

The commission's modified proposals allowed for a cut in the overall budget from 200 million units of account (one unit=one old dollar) to 185 million units and a considerable change in Euratom's hopes for non-nuclear research. Britain, France and the Netherlands, however, would only agree to projects costing 159 million units and the meeting ended unresolved with an agreement to discuss matters again on February 5.

Initial reaction in the commission is one of disappointment. The commission argues that to cut Euratom below the size it proposes will be effectively to close it down. But the British and French reasoning is that Euratom simply needs "pruning", and that cutting it down to the size they propose will not make the organization defunct. Britain is not against providing Euratom with a five year programme (it has existed on a year to year basis since 1968) but feels that those parts of the Euratom programme that have outlived their usefulness should be done away with.

The commission is hopeful, however, that the problem can in fact be settled at a political rather than a technical level. Both Britain and France want the individual projects examined in detail before they commit themselves to expenditure, but the commission, in the person of Mr Francois-Xavier Ortoli, its president, want the ministers first to accept the need for a common research programme.

One key to the problem is that the Euratom treaty is one of the founding treaties of the Common Market, so that the closure of Euratom would result in the removal of one of the com-

munity's *raison d'être*—a situation that the commission sees as intolerable and which gives it hope that a satisfactory compromise might be reached next month. If Euratom's future has to be sorted out at a purely political level then the commission believes it has a much higher chance of survival.

At last week's meeting Mr Ortoli and Mr Théo Lefevre, the Belgian science minister, both asked the ministers to take a political approach to the problem, pointing out that Euratom's expenditure is only 0.19 per cent of the total that the nine members of the EEC spend on their individual research efforts.

PARLIAMENT

Agreeing to Differ

THE differences of opinion between the government and the Select Committee for Science and Technology were aired once again in the House of Commons on Monday of this week. In a debate which asked the House to take note of the select committee's four reports on research and development and the government's observations on these reports, Mr Airey Neave, chairman of the select committee, called on the government to review its decision not to appoint a minister for research and development.

Mr Neave pointed out that the European Community is seeking a "comprehensive policy on scientific research and technological development". He asked whether the government, if it agrees that there has to be a community policy on research and development, will then consider having a national policy itself.

The government in its white papers turned down the select committee's request for an industrial advisory committee and Mr Neave confessed that he was not clear as to why it had done so. Mr Neave said that the view expressed to the select committee that industry should do all its own research and development is false, and that "a programme of government research and development will have to be maintained by the United Kingdom if it is to remain competitive in the next 25 years".

This suggestion is one of the "main themes behind some of the recommendations of the select committee", said Mr Neave but Mr James Prior, Leader of the House of Commons, said