

penetrate water to depths of a metre or more, the committee suggests that the effect of increased ultraviolet intensities on aquatic plant and animal life should be carefully studied, especially in view of the importance of plankton in the food chain.

As for skin cancers, the committee points out that the three most common malignant skin tumours—squamous cell and basal cell carcinomas and malignant melanomas—are all correlated with exposure to sunlight, and quotes a calculation that “a 5 per cent decline in ozone would produce at least 8,000 extra cases of skin carcinomas and melanomas per year in a population the size of the white population of the United States”.

One conclusion stands out clearly from the report, however—that the experimental basis for the committee's concerns is scanty, to say the best. The committee has therefore recommended, first, that a network of ground level stations should be established at various latitudes to monitor the intensity and wavelength distribution of solar ultraviolet radiation, to monitor possible environmental changes but also to enable proper evaluation of data on latitudinal variations in the incidence of skin cancer in man. Second, laboratory and field studies of the effects of increased ultraviolet radiation on the growth and yield of agricultural plants and on the sensitivity of plankton are urgently required. Finally, it is implicit in the report that these studies should be carried out well before a large SST fleet ploughs through the stratosphere.

ENERGY

Congress Committee

by our Washington Correspondent

THE House Committee on Science and Astronautics has decided to establish a new subcommittee on energy. The chairman will be Representative Mike McCormack, a second-term Democrat from Washington State, who by-passes several more senior committee members to take charge of the committee. McCormack, who until this year was the only working scientist to sit in Congress, was chairman in the last session of a task force on energy of the Science and Astronautics Committee, the final report of which is due to be published in the next few weeks. The new subcommittee is essentially an upgrading of the task force.

Although plans for the subcommittee have not yet been fully worked out, it will probably concentrate on the research and development aspects of energy production, and it will thus take a longer term view of energy supply. Some fourteen Congressional committees now have an interest in energy.

BUDGETS

The Battle Continues

by our Washington Correspondent

THE battle between President Nixon and Congress over which branch of the government should control the federal pursestrings reached boiling point last week. The focus of the disagreement is the fact that President Nixon has slashed federal spending this year by refusing to allocate some money appropriated by Congress, an action which has been regarded on Capitol Hill as usurping Congress's constitutional right to control federal spending. The White House, on the other hand, has stoically maintained that it has the authority, under a variety of acts of Congress, to apportion all or part of appropriated funds as it sees fit. The interest of the scientific community in the affair is that about \$600 million of the impounded funds were earmarked for scientific projects.

Representative John Davis, the chairman of the House Science, Research and Development Subcommittee, last week stepped into the fray by introducing an authorization bill for the National Science Foundation which is designed both to increase the NSF's budget for 1974 and to give Congress more control over the way in which it is spent. Specifically, Davis's bill breaks the foundation's budget down into a number of items and stipulates that if any money is withheld from the total budget for the foundation, it must be taken from each item on a *pro rata* basis. Such a requirement would prevent a repetition this year of the familiar pattern, in which Davis's committee votes to increase the NSF's budget for education and graduate student support, only to have the Office of Management and Budget withhold that specific increase and effectively wipe out Congress's attempt to stamp its own priorities on the budget. Davis's proposed formula would, of course, leave congressionally determined priorities intact, even though funding for each item might be reduced.

In other developments related to the power of the purse, a special subcommittee of the Senate on the Separation of Powers provided a forum for several shouting matches between senators and members of the Administration, but produced little of substance. Congress also decided to opt for a head-on clash with President Nixon over his impoundments by directing him to spend all of the \$225 million he has withheld this year from the Rural Environmental Assistant Program. All indications are that Nixon will veto the bill, and since it was passed in the House of Representatives by 251 votes to 142, it will need to pick up more support to get the

two-thirds majority needed to override the veto.

A more promising development was the publication of an interim report by a special joint committee set up last year to devise a plan for Congress to set its own budget ceiling. The committee has suggested that bipartisan units should be established in both houses of Congress, with representation from appropriations and taxation committees. The idea would be for the committees to draw up spending ceilings and revenue raising targets early in the sessions, and that the appropriations committees would work to them. The machinery for implementing such a proposal will take several weeks to work out, however, so next year's budget will have to be set in the usual manner.

ENERGY POLICY

AEC to the Fore

by our Washington Correspondent

THE Federation of American Scientists has suggested that the Atomic Energy Commission should broaden the base of its activities and become the chief agency in the federal government concerned with energy policies. The commission already has the authority for certain non-nuclear operations, the federation says, and “it is self-evidently the strongest of the government agencies for this purpose”. The idea would be to transfer to the AEC energy-related programmes of other federal agencies, to turn the Atomic Energy Commission into an Energy Agency. The FAS has felt moved to recommend such a reorganization because the so-called energy crisis is so acute that it cannot wait for longer-term bureaucratic solutions.

President Nixon's reorganization plans call for a Department of Natural Resources to be established by amalgamating several existing agencies, including those having responsibility for energy production, but the FAS points out that the plan has been languishing in the committee rooms of Capitol Hill for two years, and stands little chance of being speedily accepted this year. Broadening the activities of the AEC would, however, not require massive government reorganization.

Part of the plan would also be to divorce the AEC's regulatory responsibilities from its promotional responsibilities by setting up a single energy regulatory agency with responsibility for controlling nuclear energy, gas, oil and coal.

The plan is, however, unlikely to find friends in the White House, because President Nixon is expected soon to propose again the creation of a Department of Natural Resources.