

EXPENDITURE by the Department of Industry on research and development has risen 18% to £83 million in the year 1974/5 (*Report on Research and Development 1974*, HMSO £1.10). This barely keeps pace with inflation—even less so when allowance is made for £1 million or so of Rothschild-type transfers to the department in the last year. And when the applications and satellites (expenditure on which, in the form of subventions to the European Space Research Organisation, has risen in a year from £6.9 million to £15.4 million) are removed, the growth is decidedly negative.

Departmental expenditure on exploration and exploitation of the Earth has almost doubled in real terms in the last year to £5.5 million, all the new money going on the marine side. On the other hand civil aeronautics (excluding Concorde), hardly a booming business at present, declines 15% in real terms, getting £17 million of support.

Industry and government establishments now almost equally divide the department's money, industry having increased its share from 42% to 49%. The department's largest laboratories, however, the National Physical Laboratory and the National Engineering Laboratory suffer 10% cuts in real terms.

● Dr Walter Marshall, Chief Scientist at the Department of Energy, was given a rough ride last week by the Select Committee on Science and Technology who were clearly astonished at the lack of progress in formulating a strategy for Britain's research and development into means of energy conservation and developing new energy sources.

The Department of Energy is "still in a thinking period," Dr Marshall told the select committee when asked about the achievements of the multifarious committees that are currently worrying about energy. Dr Marshall and other members of the Advisory Council for Research and Development of Fuel and Power (ACORD) which reviews the research and development of the nationalised energy industries were closely questioned about the specific achievements of this body amongst others.

Dr Marshall said that he expected to produce a strategy in the next few months but that he did not like making promises. The matter of energy research was extremely complex and it had to be recognised that in energy research, the time scales between research and commercial application could be decades.

He was certainly disappointed that the level of spending on energy (other than nuclear power) remained at the present level, and the energy pro-

## Round Britain

gramme will demand more money over the years. In the short term, Dr Marshall admitted that conservation schemes would be given priority over schemes to develop new sources of energy as they produced the most immediate savings. He defended the seeming lack of progress since his appointment six months ago by telling the committee that although it was necessary to get going on the energy programme quickly, it must be in the right direction, which meant a great deal of preparatory work.

● Before last year's somewhat abortive International Law of the Sea conference at Caracas, the responsible British minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, David Ennals, held a day-long meeting in London which all interested parties could attend, ride their hobby horses and tilt at their favourite windmills. The Conference reconvenes in Geneva in March with a heightened need for agreements and a convention. On January 30, David Ennals chaired a second get-together at Church House but the level of argument seemed to have been pulled down by the overlong and over-strident proceedings at the international level at Caracas. A disproportionate time was spent on airing the narrow prejudices of the fishing industry presented as facts. The problem of enforcing penalties for oil pollution at sea seemed as far away as ever though a possibly practical suggestion was to invoke the responsibility of the port of origin as

well as the supposed flag of the offending vessel — too often one of convenience.

● The future of the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia now seems assured. After a period in which the work of the unit was severely hampered by uncertainty about where funds would be coming from over the next quinquennium, the Director, Professor Hubert Lamb, has been able to announce the award of several major grants to his team.

Largest of these is £100,000 from the Wolfson Foundation, covering the years up to June 1979 and "with no strings attached", says Professor Lamb. A Rockefeller Foundation grant of \$120,000 is specifically for a project on mapping and analysing available reports of weather, chiefly from various parts of Europe and Iceland, which cover many centuries in the past. This project will run until October 1977, and it is hoped to extend the analyses back for 1,000 years.

Professor Lamb has stressed the urgent desirability of increasing the number of staff in his unit, and a Nuffield Foundation grant of £24,228 will provide for the appointment of a Deputy Director from March 1976 to December 1979. The unit is also carrying out work under contract for various interested parties, including the City Authorities of Hamburg, who are interested in the incidence of disastrous storm floods in the North Sea, and the Commercial Union Assurance Company, which is supporting a three-year study of changes in the global incidence of tropical cyclones.

The dramatic turnaround in the unit's fortunes is also highlighted by Professor Lamb's future plans. His ambition for the unit to become more interdisciplinary in nature seems likely to be fulfilled, with a Nature Conservancy Council contract for a biologist to study effects attributable to climatic change on the distribution of the natural flora and fauna of the UK and North-west Europe, and "hopes of appointing an economist to keep watch on the impact of current climatic fluctuations on the world food situation, trade and other international aspects".

would be one of the main preoccupations of the central unit.

For positive identification of compounds included in any part of the register, use would be made of the Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) Registry Number, which is already used by most data collections, although there will certainly be many instances in which this cannot be used.

A major problem may be the coverage of trivial and trade names of substances in languages other than English,

and it is here that international co-operation, especially with manufacturers, will be most necessary.

Consideration was also given to the hardware and software that will be required as the register is developed. One facility that could be of great use is the International Computing Centre, a UN inter-agency facility in Geneva, but it is appreciated that not all storage of data will be computerised, especially in view of the marked interest in the register already being shown in some of the

developing countries.

The presence of scientists from the Soviet Union and Hungary, as well as from Brazil, Ghana, Togo, the Philippines, Tanzania and India, in addition to almost all the highly industrialised countries, shows that the need for this new move in environmental protection is widely appreciated.

With a bit of luck the work of the group will not be hamstrung by the economies being applied elsewhere in the United Nations system. □