

of powers never enjoyed active consummation; if it had, there is little doubt that it was a potential vote-winner for Labour.

In the December shuffle of responsibilities by Mr Fraser, all consumer activities were removed from Science and split between Attorney General's (consumer protection) and a new Department of Business and Consumer Affairs (consumer standards) where it will require devilish determination to prevent a conflict of interest between business and consumers, to the likely detriment of the latter. Patents, incidentally, continue to bounce around; their administration has now gone from Attorney General's to Business and Consumer Affairs. The fate of consumerism under the Liberals mirrors that of environmentalism which has similarly been buried within a large department of diverse interests, namely Environment, Housing and Community Affairs.

Also after the election, the Department of Minerals and Energy was re-named National Resources under the National Country Party Leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Doug Anthony, as Minister. Professor Messel and Sir Lenox Hewitt retain influence in the department's area of responsibility through the Australian Atomic Energy Commission (AAEC), of which Sir Lenox is Vice-Chairman. Two of the five places on the AAEC have been vacant for some time. Mr Connor was probably keeping his empire-building options open; one of these options was thought to be the creation of a new multi-energy research and development authority which would have incorporated the AAEC, the Bureau of Mineral Resources and the Mineral Research Laboratories of CSIRO, all of which were then under Mr Connor's control. Mr Anthony has not held on to the CSIRO bit, and has shown no indication of how he will treat the AAEC.

The disciplined control on information within the Fraser ministry meant that it was not until some time after the election that the most senior people in CSIRO could obtain clarification of the line of responsibility of their organisation. The new Science Minister, Senator Webster, is now solely responsible for the Science and Industry Act which gives CSIRO its statutory independence. The Minister-CSIRO line is direct and separate from the Minister-Department line. In the face of diminished duties, the Science Department is not out of the woods yet; it will have to work hard to maintain its position which could be called into question whenever Mr Fraser reshuffles his Cabinet or when its Secretary reaches retiring age within a couple of years.

Senator Webster himself is somewhat of an unknown quantity. Before his elevation to the ministry, he was known only to the public through having survived a legal challenge to his eligibility to sit in Parliament on grounds of alleged improprieties in dealings between a family company and the government. Since coming to office, Senator Webster has made only the odd routine announcement on behalf of the organisations under him. He is not yet known for having a personal interest in science. However green a minister he may appear at the moment to senior Australian scientists, he is no different in pre-knowledge of scientific affairs from either of his Labour predecessors, and given his parliamentary reputation as a diligent worker on committees, Senator Webster should make something of his job in a stable political environment.

Labour's heritage

If nothing else, the political awakening

of Australia under Labour has produced a quality of information and debate about science policy which is likely to work to the benefit of Australian science in the long run. On a more universal plane, the thoughtful, informed and voluminous reports issued recently, and the subsequent arguments about the very necessity for a Department of Science in any national government, are worthy of separate analysis outside the election context, for the factors involved for science planning may well prove to have global validity.

On the Australian scene, after five years of almost stand-still operations while awaiting times of enlightenment in science policy, it is sad to reflect that the arrival of these very times has coincided with a period of tight-fisted, inflation-dominated management of the economy. Australian scientists had deserved a better deal from both parties; but perhaps they were simply too nice and soft for too long. □

Ringing the changes

Australian science did not escape the impact of the country's political hiatus, as shown by this summary, covering in order the changes over the period beginning a few days before the election:

- The Science Task Force of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration recommended abolition of the Department of Science, and redistribution of its functions among other departments.
- Mr Fraser, the second former Minister for Education and Science in a Liberal Government to become Prime Minister (the first was Mr John Gorton), won an outstanding victory, helped by a long-standing imbalance in size of electorates in favour of the conservative parties—Labour received 43% of votes but gained only 25% of seats.
- The first Labour Minister for Science, Mr Bill Morrison (later Minister for Defence) lost his seat by a handful of votes. The second, and last Labour Minister for Science (and Consumer Affairs), Mr Clyde Cameron, retained his seat and immediately lambasted Mr Whitlam for his leadership (which had led to the demotion of Mr Cameron to the Science portfolio).
- Mr Fraser appointed Senator James Webster, of the National Country Party, as Minister for Science, the portfolio which has the lowest seniority. The Department of Science remained in existence, but without consumer affairs.
- The Department of the Environment, another Labour-initiated de-

partment, was abolished and its staff absorbed and reorganised under the umbrella of the new Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development. This department also embraced the Labour-established Department of Urban and Regional Development. Its Minister is Senator Ivor Greenwood, a hard-line conservative.

● The Secretary of the Department of Science, Sir Hugh Ennor, publicly castigated the Task Force's recommendation that his department be abolished, saying it "lacked credibility" and "questionable logic".

● The Australian Academy of Science was publicly drawn into the debate about the usefulness of the Department of Science through the release of its submission to the Task Force. In appealing with feeling for stability in organisation and financing of science, the Academy concentrated on strengthening the advisory roles to government of the Academy itself and the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC); the Academy mentioned the Department only in passing.

● The CSIRO was returned from a dual responsibility to Labour's Minister for Science and Consumer Affairs and Minister for Minerals and Energy to a single Minister for Science under the Liberals.

● The election by staff of a member of the CSIRO Executive, a mild attempt by Labour at worker participation, was stopped in mid-flight just before nominations closed. Official reason—to give time for re-examination of the implications.