

Note

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THE DEMISE OF THE FISHERIES RESEARCH BOARD OF CANADA:
A CASE STUDY OF CANADIAN RESEARCH POLICY*

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In January 1973, the Fisheries Research Board of Canada (FRB), after seventy-five years of operation, was relieved of responsibility for its research facilities and became a purely advisory body. It is the purpose of this paper to explain this policy outcome. This case study will, hopefully, lead to a better understanding of the manner in which research policy has evolved in the Canadian context.

The FRB was founded in 1898 when Parliament approved an appropriation for the establishment of the Board of Management of the Marine Biological Station of Canada.¹ The Board was the first research organization financed by the federal government whose direction was primarily the responsibility of academic scientists. In the period up until 1925, the biological stations of the Board had no permanent employees but provided research facilities for academic scientists and their students. A series of changes that occurred in the mid-1920s set up the administrative form that continued until the Board's demise. The FRB thus organized was an autonomous scientific institution reporting directly to the minister responsible for the fisheries and administered by a board which included representatives from all three sectors (university, government and industry). The duties of the Board, as mandated by law, were as follows:

The Board shall have charge of all biological stations in Canada and shall have the conduct and control of investigations of practical and economic problems connected with marine and fresh water fisheries, flora and fauna, and such other work as may be assigned to it by the Minister.²

What was the official rationale given for the 1973 changes to the FRB? Jack Davis, acting Minister of the Environment at the time, presented his conception of the future role for the FRB to the members of the Board in January of 1973:

He (the Minister) expressed the hope that the Board would relate itself to the Research and

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Development functions more in line with the broad Management Operations of the Fisheries and Marine Service, specially in the areas of improved effort in the fisheries, and to strengthen Canada's bargaining position in the international fisheries field. He felt the Board should show substantial results to compare with the investment being made, to make it more comprehensible at the political level. He welcomed from the Board a clear indication of priorities which could be related in a more tangible fashion with the broad management philosophies of the Fisheries and Marine Service. In closing, he stated that with the Board's assistance, Research Programs could be improved in a more tangible way, if the Board could be more critical of the Research and Development programs in the Fisheries and Marine Service so that priorities could be established not only in the short-term but in the mid-term as well.³

K.C. Lucas, the newly appointed Senior Deputy Minister, who was also in attendance at the same meeting, added the following argument:

In order to be effective ... the research programs could not be permitted to have separate objectives since ... research (was) only an activity and not ... an end in itself.⁴

These then were the official reasons given for the changes to the FRB. In order to broaden the question and to place the official reasons in their historical context, let us now examine the evolution of organization structures and of policy positions in the immediately preceding years, 1968-1973.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a particularly turbulent period for those government organizations concerned with fisheries and with the broader question of resources.⁵ On 12 July 1968 an Order-in-Council combined the Fisheries Department and the Forestry Branch of the Department of Forestry and Rural Development to create the new Fisheries and Forestry Department. On 26 November 1970 another Order-in-Council transferred a number of branches, services and divisions from a number of other departments as well as transferring responsibility for the Canada Water Act (1970). A major reorganization of the Department of Fisheries and Forestry in May 1971 preceded the creation of the Department of the Environment (DOE) in June of that year and finally on 15 December 1972 the minister announced the major reorganization mentioned above.

These organizational changes radically altered the organizational environment in which the FRB operated. In 1968 the Board had considerable support and good relations with its major clients: the universities, the fisheries industry and the Ministry of Fisheries, and could securely function, as it was mandated, providing research support for the fisheries and contributing generally to the advancement of knowledge. At this time the Board had eighteen members, ten from the

universities, seven from the fishing industry and one from government. This intersectoral body set objectives and policies for ten research establishments which together employed a staff of 959.

After 1968 the general trend, as is evidenced by the organizational changes, was towards the integration of all agencies involved with renewable resources. Integration placed the FRB in a difficult position that questioned its traditional functions as well as its relations with other organizations.

The turbulence of the period evident in the departmental restructuring is also apparent in the policy area. One sees the development of a number of overlapping policy perspectives. Each of these policies had its own 'philosophy,' its own policy prescriptions and its own view of fisheries problems.

Let us begin by looking at the areas of concern related to 'resources' and keep clearly in view the manner in which the various policy issues affected the FRB. The effects of pollution at the end of the 1960s were becoming increasingly evident. These concerns were expressed by what can be called the 'environmental movement' but equally by representatives of the fishing industry who saw pollution as a major threat to fishing. The government took very strong action in 1970 with the passage of the Clean Water Act. This legislation was particularly important to the FRB as it established the Marine Service of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources (EMR), the government agency responsible for the area of water pollution. The FRB had seen pollution research as a major area in which it should become involved. In its brief to the Lamontagne Committee in 1968, the Board recommended that its mandate be expanded to include 'a large and active share in the responsibility for water resources generally,'⁶ and although J.R. Weir, the chairman of the Board, was able to claim that the FRB in 1970 had the 'nucleus for tackling environmental and pollution problems,'⁷ it is clear that major responsibility had been passed to another agency. This can be seen as a major setback to the possibility of an expansion of the Board's research activities.

The establishment of the DOE was predicated on the relatively new conception of resource policy, which in turn relied for its existence on the political strength of the environmental movement. The bringing together of a wide range of formerly diverse policy areas was rationalized by the minister in terms of more efficient resource management. In his introduction to the bill to create the DOE, Jack Davis, Minister of Fisheries and Forestry at the time, had the following comments:

I should like to say at the outset that shaping our Canadian environment is the biggest challenge we face in the 1970's ... From now on our emphasis must be on the wise management of our living resources -- fish, forests, birds, wildlife -- and the renewed quality of our water, our soil and our air are the keys to a better future.⁸

What was the FRB's response to this new policy perspective? Weir, chairman of the Board, was abundantly aware of this new policy orientation as he had had experience that he brought with him from the Science Secretariat which had been involved in this area. His reports to the Board show the extent to which he tried to shift research in this new direction. The success of this thrust is reported in the *Annual Report* of 1972 when Weir describes the new research activities in the areas of renewable resources and environmental quality, this despite a severely restricted budget.

This is perhaps the best place to examine the Water Sector of EMR which was the main competitor to the FRB in the area of the expertise in 'resource management' and can be called the 'bureaucratic winner' in the reorganization of the DOE of 1973. In 1970 three units of EMR were transferred to the Department of Fisheries and Forestry. They were the Marine Sciences Branch, the Inland Waters Branch and the Policy Planning Branch. The activities of all three overlapped to a certain extent with those of the FRB. The Marine Sciences Branch was active in hydrography and oceanography and the Inland Waters Branch in water resource research. The Policy and Planning Branch, at the time of its transfer, was involved in a number of committees working on resource policy and was active in the formulation of resource policy in its Resources Research Centre. A parallel system to formulate resource and fisheries policy existed in the Board in the form of a number of advisory committees.

Let us now turn our attention to what can be loosely called the 'government efficiency movement' which, beginning with the Glassco Commission and implemented through Government Organization Acts, had a profound effect on the Canadian government in the 1960s and 1970s. The 'science policy movement' can be seen as part of the larger movement. The *modus operandi* of this movement was planning, which took concrete form in the PPB (Planning, Programming and Budgeting) approach championed by the Treasury Board. Planning, as conceived by this approach, required centralization of control and annual accountability.

In the system advocated by the government efficiency movement, the role prescribed for the FRB was clearly formulated as early as 1963 when the Glassco Commission recommended the integration of the FRB research facilities with the Department and the transformation of the FRB into an advisory board. Task forces led by the Treasury Board were charged with the re-organization of the DOE which put the proponents of the integration of the FRB in a particularly influential position to determine the fate of the FRB. The position of the Treasury Board on the role of government science as given in 1968 to the Lamontagne Committee by Simon Reisman was that

In the eyes of the Board, science is not regarded as a thing in itself, but rather as a means to an end. In general, particular scientific projects are not examined on their own merits but rather as components of programs which have defined objectives. 10

This reasoning, as we have seen, was the same that was evoked by the Assistant Deputy Minister in explaining the changes to the FRB. The existence of government research could be justified only to the extent that it contributed to departmental objectives.

The science policy movement, which can be said during this period to include the Science Secretariat, the Science Council, the Lamontagne Committee and the Ministry of State for Science and Technology, also provided a policy perspective in which fisheries and resource questions could be examined. The Science Council in particular had released a number of reports and background studies on these questions.

Although the Science Council preached, in general, coordination rather than integration, its general recommendations on resource policy included two that, in effect, put in question the FRB's traditional structure and functions. The Council recommended that a larger proportion of research be done in the private sector and that mission-oriented departments be given more control over funding research.¹¹ The Lamontagne attack on government science and plans to implement the so-called make-or-buy policy both put in question the very foundations of the principle underlying the FRB which was the building up of in-house expertise.

Bringing together the various elements of my analysis, I would like to conclude by proposing the following explanation of the demise of the FRB. The preconditions for the demise of the Board were the turbulence of the period at both the organizational and policy levels. The fact that the FRB was being integrated into the DOE and that fisheries research policy was being integrated into resource management policy created a situation in which the traditional support system of the Board and its traditional functions were no longer adequate. Although the Board appeared to develop a strategy consistent with the conditions of its new environment, the positions taken by proponents of resource management policy, the government efficiency movement and the science policy movement of the time demanded the integration of the FRB research facilities into departmental structures. These proponents were in the organizational positions to bring about this change.

As to the larger question of research policy in a Canadian context, it appears to me, on the basis of this case study, that the years 1968-1973 represent a particularly important period for the understanding of the evolution of research policy. The Board represented a particular model of government-science relations, an important element of which was the integration of research activity and research policy in the same administrative form that of an inter-sectoral board. Among the major reasons given by government officials for the changes to the Board were increased efficiency. This is precisely the question that needs to be posed at the policy level. Is the separation of policy and research, as was done in 1973, the most efficient way or organizing government science?

NOTES

1. An Act of Parliament in 1912 changed the name of the Board of Management of the Marine Biological Station to the Biological Board of Canada which in 1937 became the Fisheries Research Board of Canada when the Act was amended. For a history of the FRB, see Kenneth Johnstone, *The Aquatic Explorers: A History of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada* (Toronto, 1977).
2. Statutes of Canada, 1912, Chapter 6, Section 5.
3. Minutes of the 9-10 January 1973 meeting of the Fisheries Research Board.
4. Ibid.
5. This period was equally turbulent for other government scientific institutions. See G. Bruce Doern, *Science and Politics in Canada* (Montreal, 1972) and F. Ronald Hayes, *The Chaining of Prometheus: Evolution of a Power Structure for Canadian Science* (Toronto, 1973). For the reactions of officials in major government science institutions, consult a series of articles in *Science Forum* (1968), nos. 2 and 3.
6. Canada, Parliament, Senate, *Proceedings of the Special Committee on Science Policy* 17 (12 December 1968).
7. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Research Board* (1970).
8. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates* (15 October 1970), 160-1.
9. *Royal Commission on Government Organization* 4 (1963), 243.
10. Senate Special Committee, *Proceedings* 26, 3695-6.
11. Science Council of Canada, *Natural Resources Policy Issues Report No. 19* (January 1973), 8.