

Administration. The Appendix describes the individual responsibilities of these agencies and shows how they overlap and conflict. In our view a similar situation is developing in respect of the UK Continental Shelf. We also note in passing that the US Federal Government have established a Committee on Assessment of Safety of Outer Continental Shelf Activities.

4.10. The responsibility for all offshore safety matters should therefore, as a matter of urgency, be put into the hands of a single agency. Of the three agencies involved D/Trade has the minor role and is not a contender, leaving the choice between HSE and D/Energy. The single agency should in principle handle all offshore safety matters within government and this will mean the transfer or re-allocation of certain responsibilities between those currently involved. If HSE is chosen then it should be given the current D/Energy responsibility, and conversely if D/Energy is chosen it should be given the HSE responsibility. In both cases the arrangement whereby D/Trade carry out examinations on an agency basis should be terminated and the single agency should assume that task. The choice of agency is entirely a matter for the Government; a third choice (rejected by the Committee) would be to defend the present complicated arrangements or to vary the blend of responsibilities if it finds the arguments for a single agency are not completely compelling.

4.11. From the considerations outlined in the previous paragraphs the Committee came to the conclusion that the arguments for a single agency are compelling. D/Trade should continue to exercise its functions in relation to ships and maritime policy generally and will therefore (as described in para 4.7) have an important but minor input. There will remain a residual role for either D/Energy or HSE after the choice is made. For example it is unthinkable that D/Energy would ignore advice on general trends and practices onshore in formulating offshore safety policy: nor would HSE be likely to ignore advice from D/Energy about potential geological hazards in considering the safety aspects of well control. Arrangements will need to be made so that the necessary degree of consultation takes place though this does not necessarily imply the continued use of a standing committee (such as the Interdepartmental Committee on Marine Safety). In short we have attempted to present the arguments for a simplification of the present complicated system. We acknowledge the risk of over-simplification but believe that we have avoided this pitfall. The complications of the present system and therefore the problems of disentangling them are also acknowledged and the Government will not in our view find the decision to adopt a single agency without its difficulties.

4.12. The removal from D/Energy of any responsibility for safety matters would satisfy the argument that as a matter of principle no single organisation should be responsible for safety matters and sponsorship of the industry. The argument goes that it is inevitable that economic and political pressures will influence attitudes towards safety and in individual cases undue risks may be condoned for the sake of economic benefit. There is strong support for this view expressed by the TUC. Others take the view that operational control and safety are inseparable.

4.13. The decision to transfer the enforcement function to HSE would carry certain implications. There have been criticisms of the HSE's involvement in