UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

CHAIRMAN

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U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

April 13, 1981

COMMISSION CORRESPONDENCE

The Honorable Walter B. Jones, Chairman
Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your request for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) views on H.R. 1720, a bill to establish a task force to identify ocean sites and the nature of radioactive wastes which were dumped into the ocean prior to 1970 and to prepare a comprehensive plan for monitoring and assessing the impacts which such wastes have had on the environment and the public health. The NRC neither opposes nor favors enactment of this bill.

H.R. 1720 would establish a task force composed of representatives of seven federal agencies, including the NRC, to: (1) prepare an inventory of sites at which radioactive waste material was dumped into ocean waters adjacent to the United States after 1945 and before 1970; (2) assess the adverse effects of the radioactive waste on the public health and environment; (3) develop a comprehensive plan for continuously monitoring such waste; and (4) report to Congress on these matters. In preparing the inventory, the task force, with cooperation from those federal entities which either dumped radioactive waste or authorized such dumping, shall determine the nature and origin of the waste material, the type of containment used for the material, and the date and method of dumping. The bill would also require the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to immediately initiate a preliminary monitoring program at those ocean sites which EPA believes may be causing significant adverse impacts on the public health and environment.

Authority over the ocean disposal of radioactive waste is currently vested in EPA pursuant to the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972. Prior to 1972, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) had regulatory authority over the ocean disposal of radioactive waste. The NRC, as the successor agency to the AEC's licensing authority, is the custodian of information regarding the ocean disposal of radioactive waste by AEC licensees. In the past few months, the NRC provided that information to Congress and EPA. Therefore, the NRC does not expect that its participation on the task force would lead to the contribution of additional information on the location and character of radioactive waste disposed of in the ocean by AEC licensees. However, the NRC would contribute to the development of a comprehensive plan by assisting in the provision of monitoring, projection, and assessment of the migration of radionuclides from radioactive waste through

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the marine environment and food chain. NRC participation in the preparation of the task force report would require approximately one person-year of effort. No further NRC effort appears to be needed after that report is submitted to Congress.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this bill.

Sincerely,

Joseph M. Hendrie