

## Book Reviews

*Managing the Water Environment*, edited by Neil A. Swainson. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press (in association with the Westwater Research Centre), 1976. Pp. ix, 256; \$15.50.

This book brings together a series of six papers presented at a seminar sponsored by the Westwater Research Centre of the University of British Columbia at the University of Victoria in 1973. It also includes two essays by the editor, and a foreword by Irving Fox, director of the centre. The result is a group of papers that sometimes speak of managing the the water environment, but more often speak of more general things, using water quality from time to time as an illustrative example. Most are not uninteresting, although some are a bit ponderous and even at times quite dull.

As Professor Fox points out in the foreword, and as most of the others repeat, the volume does not propose a definitive solution to the problem of allocating common property. Professor Swainson attempts in the first paper to define the problems associated with institutional arrangements for water-quality management. Here a number of interesting issues are brought forward, but a clear focus on the problem is not really among them.

R. T. Franson, D. Blair and R. Bozzer present a useful summary of the various pollution control regulations in British Columbia. While offering some comment on these measures, they do not get into such things as issues of regulation and compensation for losses or of what is assumed in the nature of property rights associated with cleaner environments or with waste discharge.

The issue of rights and the means and consequences of changing them is taken up only by Marc Roberts in an essay on "the complexities of real policy choice." Many readers, however, may want to question his assertion that "in our society we have generally assigned rights [to pollute] to the would-be polluter" (p. 165). Certainly an alternative view of property

rights belonging to society, or the government on its behalf, is at least as plausible both as a description of current attitudes and as a presumption for developing policies.

Roberts discusses, but almost in passing, the varied costs that might be associated with different approaches to pollution control. Others make no mention of this whatsoever, even though there is reasonable evidence that the course generally followed is likely to very greatly increase the costs of achieving any given level of quality. And related to this, but not discussed, is the continuing problem of choosing between "fair" requirements of equal levels of discharge reductions, which will greatly increase costs; or achieving economies by treating individual discharges very differently.

The short paper by John Dales will seem for many readers a much more clearly focused discussion. Most of his conclusions are not at all new but many will welcome his puncturing of balloons.

In all, the book brings together the worries and the proposals of people with somewhat varied backgrounds. It is useful to have many of these in one place. It is not, however, an easy and readable compendium for non-specialists, and for those with more experience in the area, there is not much which is new.

There will probably be for most people going through from the beginning, as well as most professionals who have worked on the problems, sympathy for what editor Swainson seems to say in his conclusions — that we may have talked enough about these things and it is time to try out some new ideas. However, elected and appointed officials still seem to find it easier to gravely express concern and to nudge things a little further on the present course than to alter directions. This might be changed if more people more clearly understood the issues. It is somewhat a pity that this book, in spite of its other uses, will not help much along this line.

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*Environmental Law: A Study of Legislation Affecting the Environment of British Columbia*, by John G. Ince. Vancouver: Centre for Continuing Education, 1976. Pp. 209; \$10.00.

This loose-leaf handbook on environmental law in British Columbia, produced in co-operation with the West Coast Environmental Law Association, is a worthwhile effort in bringing the law in a more intelligible form to the interested public.