

November 19, 1996

EPA-SAB-EC-COM-97-001

Honorable Carol M. Browner
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20460

SUBJECT Science Advisory Board Commentary on Agency activities
associated with Environmental Futures

Dear Ms. Browner:

I writing to express the Science Advisory Board's (SAB) support for the Agency as it take steps to incorporate a long-range view of the global environmental future in its dealings with its international partners.

In January 1995, the SAB submitted to you our Beyond the Horizon report, subtitled "Using Foresight to Protect the Environmental Future" (EPA-SAB-EC-95-007). Associated with that report was a Technical Annex ("Future Methods and Issues", EPA-SAB-EC-95-007A) and reports from five of the SAB Committees describing how they had "looked beyond the horizon" to anticipate future environmental problems in specific areas.

Given the fundamental change in focus and the far-reaching consequences associated with thinking 20-30 years into the future, it is perhaps understandable that the Agency has not been able to address all of the issues developed in these reports in the past year and half. While it may be disappointing that more has not been done in response to some of the recommendations in these reports, we want to commend the Agency for its international initiatives that illustrate that the Agency is taking the matter of the future seriously.

First, we are encouraged by the initiative that you and Deputy Administrator Fred Hansen have taken in putting "the future" explicitly on the agenda of G-7 countries. By hosting the Environmental Futures Forum next spring and presenting the results of the

Forum to the G-7 principals next summer, you are shining a global spotlight on the first and fourth recommendations in the Beyond the Horizon report:

"1. As much attention should be given to avoiding future environmental problems as to controlling current ones."

"4. EPA should stimulate coordinated national efforts to anticipate and respond to environmental change."

Indeed, you have surpassed our expectations in recommendation 4 by bringing the issue to a global forum. We look forward to working with you, as appropriate, to making the Forum a significant and successful first step in responding to these recommendations.

Second, we were impressed by the presentations of Mr. William Nitze (AA/OIA) and Dr. Alan Hecht (DAA/OIA) at our meeting on September 17-18, 1996, in which they described their Environmental Security Initiative. While we did not examine the proposal in detail, we did see it as a significant, positive response to another of the SAB recommendations:

"EPA, as well as other agencies and organizations, should recognize that global environmental quality is a matter of strategic national interest."

We would be happy to provide further review and insight about the scientific and technical merits of the proposal as it evolves, should you find that helpful.

In closing, I want to applaud the imaginative responses to some of our recommendations. These are examples of the forward-looking, future-oriented thinking that we hoped would result from the Beyond the Horizon effort.

I look forward to your response to these comments and to your ideas about what additional steps can be taken to incorporate "futures thinking" into Agency practice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Genevieve M. Matanoski". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Genevieve Matanoski, Chair
Executive Committee
Science Advisory Board