



On 'Concurrence' and the Role of the NASA Chief Scientist: Letter Report

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AUTHORS

Committee on the Future of Space Science, National Research Council

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On "Concurrence" and the Role of the NASA Chief Scientist

On December 12, 1995, Space Studies Board Chair Claude R. Canizares and the Committee on the Future of Space Science Chair John A. Armstrong sent the following letter to NASA Chief Scientist France Cordova.

On behalf of our colleagues, we wish to thank you and your associates in NASA management for the detailed and thoughtful response you are developing to the recent report of the Space Studies Board's Committee on the Future of Space Science, entitled *Managing the Space Sciences*. It appears from these draft responses and from the discussion of them at the Board meeting on November 28 that the report uses the term "concurrence" in a way that has led to some misunderstanding. This letter is intended to clarify the report's recommendation that the NASA Chief Scientist be given formal concurrence authority with respect to matters of science budgets, programs, and plans.

In the report, "concurrence" is not meant to imply an additional level of line management interposed between the NASA Administrator and the science associate administrators. On the contrary, the intent of the report is that the associate administrators will continue to present their plans, budgets, and programs directly to the Administrator, as at present. They will report, as now, directly to the Administrator.

The report's recommendation on concurrence does propose the establishment of a formal procedure whereby, at presentations of plans and budgets by the science associate administrators, the Administrator would ask the Chief Scientist for a position on what has been proposed. The expectation would be that if the Chief Scientist did not support a particular proposal, he or she would explain why not. Of course, the Administrator would be completely free, as he is now, to overrule the views of the Chief Scientist (as he is also free to reject proposals made by senior line management). In practice, the Chief Scientist consults with the associate administrators throughout the process of developing plans and budgets, and the great majority of potential sources of disagreement and nonconcurrence would be resolved long before they reach the Administrator.

The committee and Board believe that the proposed concurrence mechanism corresponds fairly well to present, but informal, practice. The committee's report suggests, however, that this mechanism, if formalized and adopted by the Administrator, would strengthen the coordinating role that the Chief Scientist is expected to perform across the agency's science programs. The committee and Board further expect that formalizing the concurrence function of the Chief Scientist would increase the appeal of that position to highly qualified candidates in the future.

Members of our committee would be pleased to meet with NASA officials to discuss this or other recommendations of the report; such a meeting might provide a good opportunity, in particular, to explore the report's recommendations on the research prioritization process.

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