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William R. Ahern, Jr.**

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Oil and the Outer Coastal Shelf: The Georges Bank Case

BY WILLIAM R. AHERN, JR.

Ballinger, 1973

133 pp. \$10.00

William Ahern's study of the Georges Bank oil leasing controversy is the result of one of the first doctoral dissertations to emerge from the new Public Policy Program in the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Professor Neustadt is correct in stating (p. xi) that Ahern's study is "comprehensive, clear, imaginative and persuasive." Ahern presents the relevant range of information with which to make an intelligent decision as to whether to develop the possible oil resources near Massachusetts. In doing so, he relies heavily on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Offshore Oil Task Group report, *The Georges Bank Petroleum Study*. Ahern's book, being well written and succinct, will serve an important role in the decision-making process in regard to this particular controversy.

Mr. Ahern indicates that it would be an eminently reasonable decision to proceed with the development of the possible oil resources. This conclusion is supported by information that the detrimental environmental impact would be negligible. Of course, Ahern may be mistaken and the environmental risks inherent in this undertaking may be much greater than he himself believes or indicates. This problem of uncertainty is not, however, unique to his study. Unknowns and unknowables present insurmountable problems to conscientious decision-makers. Within the limits of available information, Ahern's analysis is well done. He discusses the economics of the venture from regional, national, and world perspectives. A few legal issues are introduced and the politics of the situation are outlined. He is perceptive in suggesting that the crucial issue may be one of public relations with illusions battling facts.

The book is a serious book but it is not without humor. On page 63, the statement is made that "... intertidal life is tough." On page 66, Ahern states: "A major trauma to a fish or shellfish is getting caught and eaten." I would not be surprised in the future to find these statements displayed in marine biology and fisheries laboratories and in graduate assistant's offices.

Conservationists will find this book worth studying, which brings up a point about the price of the book. The book is not worth \$10.00 except to someone involved in the controversy and to university libraries. No teacher with any social conscience would require his

students to pay this price for such a slim volume of limited utility, although the book would be useful as a case study in conservation and other policy courses. For all but a few, *Oil and the Outer Coastal Shelf* is a book to be checked out from the university library rather than bought.

CHANNING R. KURY