

DRAFT LETTER TO OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

MARSHALL ISLANDS RESEARCH VESSEL

The Atomic Energy Commission has a continuing responsibility for several scientific efforts in the Marshall Islands. Included are the program for biomedical surveillance of several groups of Marshallese, the operation of the Eniwetok Marine Biological Laboratory, radiological surveys of Eniwetok and Bikini, and other support to the rehabilitation efforts at those Atolls. Many of these efforts are conducted jointly with elements of the Department of Defense. For some years, the Commission has been fortunate in having available the very fine cooperation and support of the U. S. Army's Kwajalein Missile Range in pursuit of its Marshall Islands efforts. With few exceptions, however, our programs have been dependent upon the Trust Territory field trip vessels for inter-atoll transportation, and thus have been subject to the frustrations and excessive costs resulting from random and unreliable scheduling.

To enhance the effectiveness of our scientific efforts and to provide them a better level of support, the Commission's Nevada Operations Office has undertaken preliminary planning for the acquisition, outfitting, maintenance and operation of a vessel to be dedicated to AEC program needs. Current consideration contemplates an LCU-type vessel with modular fitting-out for each of its several tasks by means of a family of semitrailers in a variety of laboratory configurations.

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Through informal discussions with representatives of the Kwajalein Missile Range and its support contractor, it has been determined that the capability exists at that facility to provide maintenance and support to the operation of an additional LCU. Kwajalein currently operates four such vessels supporting its mission requirements. I am advised, however, that the Commander, U. S. Army Safeguard Systems Command does not feel that he can support the AEC's requirement with his current mission assignments.

As you know, the United States' relationships with Micronesia, and particularly with the peoples of the Marshalls, are both volatile and dynamic. Our long-term commitments and obligations are viewed most seriously by the Commission. In the near term the Commission is committed to support the Department of Defense in its efforts toward the rehabilitation of Eniwetok Atoll and to maintain the radiological surveillance of Bikini which has continued since our joint AEC-DOD cleanup of that Atoll. In short it seems clearly in our mutual interest to provide solid support to the above-cited scientific efforts.

I request that action be taken to have assigned to the Commander, Kwajalein Missile Range the support mission described above. Specifically, this would entail increasing the authorization of LCU's from four to five, and providing other resource authorizations to

permit the Range to operate this additional vessel according to AEC requirements and scheduling without interfering with its current mission assignments.

The next scheduled requirement for marine support in the Marshalls will be in March 1974 in connection with a periodic medical survey of the natives of Rongelap. It would be most desirable to have the Marshall Islands Research Vessel operational at that time. To this end, and anticipating the requested mission assignment, I request your early concurrence in principle to permit further detailed examination of this matter jointly by the Nevada Operations Office and the Kwajalein Missile Range.