The National Hydrographic Bill taken into consideration by the Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security

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The Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security took into discussion matters contained in the National Hydrographic Bill, which gives the necessary legal authority to create "Electronic Navigation Charts so that Sri Lanka can earn an annual dollar income from ships sailing near the Sri Lankan waters.

It was taken into discussion when the said Committee met in Parliament recently under the chairmanship of Member of Parliament Hon. (Dr.) Sarath Weerasekera.

Hon. (Dr.) Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe who was present at the Committee meeting held stated that since 1983, the right to receive dollars from ships traveling through Sri Lankan waters has not been used. Accordingly, the Minister of Justice further commented that Sri Lanka will get the necessary legal power through the passing of this Bill.

Furthermore, through the establishment of the National Hydrographic Office, the officials stated that the purpose of this Act is to register hydrographic surveyors and nautical cartographers and to make provisions for related matters.

The Navy stated that the Royal Navy of England has created 3 maps covering the South Seas. Accordingly, the officials further commented that only data has been provided from Sri Lanka for the creation of the maps. However, the Navy officials informed the Committee that the Sri Lankan government has the right to explore and obtain data and create maps for the relevant sea areas through this Act. Based on this updated data, related maps can also be updated and dollars can be generated, the officials further said.

Officials of the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) who addressed the Committee said that some of the functions carried out by their Agency will be drifted away by this Bill. However, the Committee Chair pointed out that this Bill is currently scheduled to be debated in the Parliament and pointed out that during the Committee stage, the NARA institution will be given the opportunity to add amendments to it through the relevant Minister.

State Minister of Fisheries, Hon. Piyal Nishantha on approval of the Committee Chair and Committee Members Hon. Rauff Hakeem, Hon. (Prof.) Channa Jayasumana, Hon. (Major) Sudarshana Denipitiya, Member of Parliament Hon. Buddhika Pathirana, General (Retd) Kamal Gunaratne, Secretary to the Ministry of Defense, Vice Admiral Priyantha Perera, Commander of the Navy and the heads of related Ministries and institutions were present at this Committee meeting held.

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