Beheading Dragons: Streamlining China’s Environmental Governance

Thursday, July 12 2018
5th Floor
Recent Developments at China’s Ministry of Ecology and Environment

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From the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE)

• Institutional Reform Plan for the State Council, March 17, 2018

• To establish the MEE on the basis of MEP.
• Integrating the environmental regulatory functions of 6 other agencies.
The Plan on Deepening the Institutional Reform of the Party and State, March 21, 2018

• To establish an integrated enforcement force for ecological and environmental protection, under the guidance of MEE.
National Development and Reform Commission
climate change and carbon emission reduction

Ministry of Land and Resource
preventing groundwater pollution

Ministry of Water Resource
watershed environmental protection, the locations of discharge points, and water function planning

Ministry of Agriculture
preventing non-point source agricultural pollution

State Oceanic Administration
ocean environment protection

Office of South-North Water Transfer Project
environmental regulatory authority in project area

MEP
policymaking, monitoring, and enforcement, etc.
By May 7, 2018, the following have been incorporated into MEE

• NDRC’s Department of Climate Change and National Center for Climate Change Strategy and International Cooperation (NCSC)

• SOA’s Department of Ecological and Environmental Protection

• Office of South-North Water Transfer Project’s Department of Environmental Protection

• Certain personnel from Ministry of Water Resource and Ministry of Land and Resource
• The office of MEE may be relocated to Wangfujing in the heart of Beijing.

• China Yuanyang Press’s office, which occupied the spot until late May, has been demolished.
• MEE may thus become neighbors of the powerful Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Commerce on Chang’an Avenue, signifying its rising status among national agencies.
Monumental tasks came with the expanded power

• 7 major campaigns against pollution in the next 3 years.
  • Air pollution/blue sky,
  • Diesel vehicles,
  • Urban water pollution,
  • Bohai Sea ocean pollution,
  • Yangtze River recovery,
  • Source of rivers,
  • Agricultural and rural pollution

• The goal is to see significant results within 3 years.
• What’s missing? Soil pollution.
• The Soil Pollution Prevention and Control Law is still being drafted.
Support from the national leadership

• Xi Jinping and another 5 members of the Standing Committee of Politburo attended the National Conference on Ecology and Environment on May 18 and 19.

• The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress passed a resolution on the war against pollution on July 10th, emphasizing the rule of law.
Support from the national leadership

• Newly-elected Vice Premier Han Zheng was named the chair of a task force on combating air pollution in Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei and the nearby provinces.
Challenges and Uncertainties

• Provincial and local branches of MEE are still under-staffed and under-funded, hampering the ambitious efforts on integrated permitting systems and vigorous enforcement.

• It’s uncertain how the regulatory authorities will integrate at provincial and local levels.

• Will the strong political will to protect the environment survive a slower economic growth?
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