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P.01265

PRIME MINISTER

Environmental Pollution

FLAG A

This meeting arises from Mr Turnbull's letter of 24 January expressing your concern about the Government's defensive and reactive stance on environmental pollution matters. The report by the Official Committee on Environmental Protection (EP) circulated to you and other Ministers under cover of Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 30 March is intended to enable Ministers to review the Government's policy on environmental pollution and the scope for improving its presentation both generally and in relation to the main specific issues likely to come up in 1984.

FLAG B

MAIN ISSUES

FLAG C

2. It may be convenient to take as the agenda for the meeting the "Summary of points for Ministers" in paragraph 51 (pages 19-23) at the end of the report. For the purpose of organising the discussion it may be best to group the items as follows:

- general issues of policy and presentation;
(items a. - e.)
- the timing of major presentational initiatives;
(item f.)
- specific issues.
(items g. - k.)

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General policy and presentation

3. In brief the report is saying:

i. The substance of our policy is broadly right. We must continue to weigh costs and benefits, on the basis of proper scientific evidence. We should not move to the Uniform Emission Standards approach favoured in Europe, which would prevent us from taking advantage of our situation as a wet and windy island, and would impose unjustified cost burdens on our economy. Likewise, we should not adopt the European approach of using the "best available technology" to control emissions irrespective of cost.

ii. Nevertheless we should be readier to minimise releases in water and on land of the most toxic substances (for example mercury, cadmium, lead or persistent biocides), developing the approach of "best practicable means", used for air pollution in the UK since the 1860s, and more recently for radioactive wastes.

iii. We should explain the basis of our policy better as a way of seeking the "best practicable environmental option", taking account of economic, scientific and social factors.

iv. We should improve the credibility of our policy by directing more Government expenditure (within existing programmes) to research on environmental pollution and by encouraging more research effort by industry.

v. We should improve our tactics in international

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discussions by putting forward alternative positive proposals of our own rather than merely obstructing the proposals of others.

vi. We should make more information publicly available, subject to the minimum number of exceptions on grounds of national security and commercial sensitivity.

vii. We should seek more credit for past achievements and current programmes of action on the lines suggested in the Annex to the report.

4. You will wish to establish whether the meeting is prepared to endorse a general approach on these lines. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary might wish to argue for going further in the direction of adopting the European approach to Unified Emission Standards, but the economic departments would be opposed to that. It would not be fruitful to spend too long on the more philosophical aspects of environmental policy. In the real world it will all turn on how the difficult specific issues like acid deposition and radioactive wastes are handled. It would however be useful to ascertain whether those present at the meeting consider that the points in the Annex provide a helpful basis for improving presentation.

Timing of major presentational initiatives

5. The timing and content of the reply to the Tenth Report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, published on 22 February, will have a major effect on how the Government's attitudes are perceived publicly. It is common ground that it would not be possible to publish a sufficiently positive and substantial reply to the Royal

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Commission before July at the earliest, because the report covers a wide range of important issues. The meeting will need to consider:

- whether the target date for the reply should be July rather than October;
(the latter will probably be the timing unless a special effort is made not just by the DoE but all the other departments involved)
- whether, in addition to the reply to the Royal Commission, there should be a major presentational initiative before the summer, eg a short statement of environmental achievements and aims for publication in, say, late May in the run up to the London Economic Summit.

Specific issues

6. In respect of the specific items at g. - k. of the summary, it is mainly a matter at this stage of noting that there are some difficult issues likely to come up over the next few months for example:

- acid deposition, where the proposed EC Large Plant Directive would require expenditure at power stations (as well as other major industrial plants) which would eventually, after about 10 years, add 5 per cent to electricity costs;
- disposal of radioactive waste on land, where the Secretary of State for the Environment may be making proposals about the handling of the public enquiries relating to the sites at Billingham and Elstow.



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The report is not asking for decisions on most of these matters at this stage because more work has to be done before options can be put before Ministers.

7. There are however two issues where Ministers are invited to give a specific steer:

- whether further measures are needed to restore public confidence in Sellafield;
- whether the working of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in relation to farmers is satisfactory.

On both of these items the Secretary of State for the Environment may express concern about the current position.

8. On Sellafield it may be argued that the publication of the Black Report in May will require the Government to promise not merely (as it has recently done) that there is a plan for meeting "the highest standards which are reasonably achievable" but a plan for matching the best technical standards achieved elsewhere in the world. The Secretary of State for Energy and the Chief Secretary are likely to argue that any decisions on this must await advice on costs and benefits referred to in paragraph 34 of the report.

9. On the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 there is concern about the payments to farmers of compensation for forgoing improvements (eg land drainage) harmful to conservation. The Minister for Agriculture is likely to say that it would be premature to conclude that the arrangements need to be changed.

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Next steps

10. Depending on the course of the discussion, you will wish to consider what arrangements should be made for further Ministerial consideration of these matters. The best way of ensuring that environmental pollution continues to be accorded sufficient priority may be for you to convene a further ad hoc meeting at an appropriate time. A number of issues may be coming to a head in late May for example:

- the issue of a short statement of UK environmental achievements and aims (if this is agreed to be worth doing);
- the UK line on acid deposition for the European discussions from June onwards;
- assurances to the public about the Sellafield discharges in the light of the Black Report;
- the handling of the public enquiries about land disposal sites for radioactive wastes.

A further ad hoc Ministerial meeting in late May might therefore be timely.

HANDLING

11. The general discussion on policy and presentation might begin with comments from the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Mr Waldegrave). The Lord President may have some views on presentation and publicity. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary may wish to comment on the handling of international discussions.

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12. When you come to the specific items you will wish to bear in mind that the Ministers mainly concerned, in addition to the Environment Ministers, are:

acid deposition:	Secretary of State for Energy
vehicle emissions:	Secretary of State for Transport
radioactive wastes:	Secretary of State for Energy and Minister of Agriculture
pollution at sea:	Minister of Agriculture
agriculture and the environment:	Minister of Agriculture.

CONCLUSIONS

13. It would be helpful if the meeting were to take note of and endorse the points at paragraph 51a.-k. of the report and in particular to reach conclusions on:

- i. whether the target date for the publication of the reply to the Royal Commission Report should be July or the autumn;
- ii. whether there should be a short statement of UK environmental achievements and aims in late May or thereabouts;
- iii. whether further measures are likely to be necessary to restore public confidence in Sellafield;
- iv. whether anything needs to be done now about the working of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as it affects farmers.

PLG

P L GREGSON

3 April 1984

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PRIME MINISTER

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

It has been suggested that I put in a note on the presentational angle for your discussion tomorrow. ~~_____~~

I think it undeniable that:

- i. we have made too little of our successes in this field; ~~_____~~
- ii. we allow too much initiative to rest with critics or pressure groups; and
- iii. we allow ourselves too often to be put in the international dock - eg over acid rain (about which I remain somewhat sceptical).

What the papers suggest - to a greater or lesser degree of caution - is a more positive approach, starting with a statement immediately before the Economic Summit, followed up by a very full account of the British approach by way of reply to the Royal Commission before, I hope, the Summer Recess. ~~_____~~

But what the papers do not say is how we sustain a positive presentational approach given that the subject crosses a number of Departmental boundaries. ~~_____~~

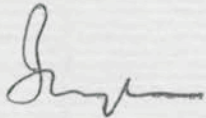
Of course, any presentational programme depends on policy decisions. But there is enough achievement to sustain a more positive presentational stance in the short period before the results of decisions would be seen in a pre-Summit statement. Thereafter the objective would be positively to explain the Government's approach and achievements and to relate individual decisions, as they are announced, to overall policy.

None of this, however, is likely to happen unless machinery is established to make it happen, because of the debilitating effects of divided Departmental responsibility. If each Department is left to its own presentational devices the effect is reduced and we often travel only at the pace of the slowest or most accident prone.

My strong advice is that if we wish to improve things specific presentational arrangements should be made on the lines of the CND and local government reform campaigns. In each of these cases presiding Ministerial responsibility has been identified and this political control has been supplemented by official information arrangements in which I have been included to provide a No 10 input and more important, drive. I would suggest the same for environmental pollution. (This would for me have the bonus of giving me a locus on nuclear waste presentation of which I have 5 years' experience and where coordination is not our strongest card).

As for policy, the problem seems to me to be one of achieving a sense of urgency and a positive and more open approach to presentation with a sound, scientifically based but internationally compatible system of control.

I hope this is helpful.



BERNARD INGHAM
4 April 1984

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PRIME MINISTER

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

The report of the Official Committee on Environmental Pollution (EP) should be a matter of concern for Ministers. It shows that the UK is lagging in certain areas of environmental protection, is clinging to some outmoded techniques and principles, is being harried by other nations on several types of pollution and responding defensively and hesitantly, and is not even getting credit for its achievements in environmental improvement.

2. The causes of the problem are:

(a) too low a priority for environmental protection matters, not only in the Department of Environment but also in other Departments which sponsor the polluters;

(b) too little anticipation of the occurrence of environmental problems so that inadequately researched ad hoc measures have sometimes had to be adopted with minimum opportunity for Ministerial discussion of policy;

(c) too little research and development carried out too late, especially in the private sector and the publicly-owned utilities.

3. The tenth report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Protection is an excellent document, far more understanding in its treatment of the British approach to environmental protection and ~~the~~ ^{far} more constructive in its recommendations than Government might have anticipated. It provides a heaven-

sent opportunity for Government to make a fresh start in its environmental protection policies and to develop a strategic approach which is more open, positive and forward-looking.

The general thrust of the Royal Commission report should be welcomed without reservation and the detailed recommendations accepted unless there is real evidence from Departments for a better alternative solution. This message should go out loud and clear before the London Economic Summit and the June round of European environmental meetings, even if a full response, regrettably, seems to be impossible before the end of July.

4. Environmental pollution and protection have a strong science base. But the science is complex, difficult and may take a long time to research. Consequently:

(a) there will be misrepresentation of the science by selection from the research results giving opportunities for mischief by pressure groups and chicanery by other nations;

(b) action has to be taken before there is scientific certainty but not before sensible judgements of a reasonable volume of scientific evidence can be made;

(c) research into the causes of pollution must lead the start of the problems by many years so that the technology of protection or prevention can be developed in time.

5. The need therefore is for better and earlier research and development by industry. The principle "The polluter pays" is well-established in prevention hardware but the polluter must also pay for research and development on the causes, effects and prevention of his pollution. Government can use its statutory powers to encourage this R&D to be done by industry. Government also needs to give a higher priority to its own R&D in environmental protection so that Ministers can be better informed of the technical basis of various policy options.

6. In summary:

(a) Government should welcome the Royal Commission report and accept some of the major recommendations before the London Economic Summit. Several recommendations, such as unrestricted access to data, adoption of the 'lean burn' solution to vehicle emissions and pilot plant studies of reduction of power plant emissions, can be accepted without undue expense or worry about remaining scientific uncertainty. Public confidence and our international position would be greatly improved by these steps.

(b) Departments should give a higher priority to environmental protection matters so that Ministers can choose policy options in good time within a soundly based overall strategy. Government could then lead nationally and internationally rather than be harried and bullied by pressure groups and other nations.

(c) Government should use its statutory and regulatory powers to ensure that industry carries out better and earlier research and development into causes, effects and solutions of its pollution problems.

RBN

ROBIN B NICHOLSON
Chief Scientific Adviser

cc: Sir Robert Armstrong

Cabinet Office
4 April 1984

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SCDP

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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

3 April 1984

Dear David,

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

The Lord President has seen the Report of the Official Committee on Environmental Pollution, which was sent to the Prime Minister under cover of Sir Robert Armstrong's minute A084/1021 of 30 March. He will be unable to attend the meeting on 5 April at which the Report is to be discussed.

The Lord President accepts that it is important in presentational terms for the Government to be seen to take a lead on environmental issues, but hopes that it will be possible for action to be concentrated in specific areas where it will gain widespread acceptance. He acknowledges that the Government must, for example, face up to the need for the agricultural industry to be more receptive to the requirements of the environment, and face up to the road haulage industry on the question of vehicle emissions. But both these industries are powerful pressure groups, and the Lord President is anxious that the Government should not too readily give firm pledges for action in areas where controversy will inevitably arise, and should proceed only after the most careful discussion.

I am sending copies of this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Michael Reedy (Department of Energy), John Graham (Scottish Office), John Ballard (Department of the Environment), Callum McCarthy (Department of Trade and Industry), David Normington (Department of Employment), Dinah Nichols (Department of Transport), Robert Lawson (MAFF), John Gieve (Chief Secretary's Office), Joan Dunn (Mr Waldegrave's Office), and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Janet Lewis-Jones

JANET A LEWIS-JONES
Private Secretary

David Barclay Esq

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Env Affairs Position
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