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THE PRIME MINISTER

19 September 1986

Dear Lord Shackleton

Thank you for your letter of 2 September about the Antarctic situation and the work and funding of the British Antarctic Survey.

I readily endorse your remarks about the major contribution which Britain in the shape of the British Antarctic Survey makes to scientific research in the Antarctic. The 'ozone hole' discovery is an excellent and topical example of work of worldwide significance in terms both of major advances in human knowledge, and of wider potential relevance to future living conditions. Advances of this kind contribute greatly to our international prestige.

I entirely take your point about the relationship between the three British territories in the South Atlantic, and the need for coherence and consistency in our policy towards them. It is certainly important that we give no signal of a reduced commitment to the British Antarctic Territory, to the Falkland Islands, or to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. We consequently recognise the need to maintain British visibility in the Antarctic, of which the British Antarctic Survey's activities are a fundamental component. Their funding is under discussion at the moment.

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I too regard the Mount Pleasant Airport development as potentially significant for Antarctic activities. As I said in a recent letter to Aubrey Buxton, we are at present thinking in terms of a future role for the Falklands in facilitating access to economic resources in the South-West Atlantic and Antarctica, particularly through civilian use of the new airport.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

Rargant Shackleton