

MS 1.  
Prime Minister (through his -mas)



PRIME MINISTER

Agree transfer of responsibility  
for offshore safety from  
Employment to Energy,  
following the Burgoyne C'ttee  
recommendation?

Yes  
ms.

MP 28/1x

OFFSHORE SAFETY

1. I am writing to seek your approval to the transfer of responsibility for offshore safety inspection and policy from me to the Secretary of State for Energy. The responsibility of the Secretary of State for Trade, for the safety of ships and seafarers, would remain unchanged.

2. At present I am responsible for occupational safety policy offshore taking advice from the Health and Safety Commission, but the Petroleum Engineering Division of the Department of Energy act as the inspection agency of the Health and Safety Commission on matters of occupational safety. The Secretary of State for Energy is already responsible for the technical aspects of structural safety and the blow-out risks involved in tapping the oil and gas reservoir.

3. The principal recommendation of the Burgoyne Committee, whose Report was presented to Parliament on 6 March 1980, was that the Government should discharge its responsibility for offshore safety via a single Government Agency. The majority view on the Committee was that the Department of Energy is capable of discharging this responsibility. Because of a minority report by the two trade union members of the Committee which recommended that the Health and Safety Commission/Health and Safety Executive should assume total responsibility in this area, we set up an interdepartmental working group of officials under a chairman from the Civil Service Department, to advise Ministers. The Group recommended that the most appropriate solution would be for the Secretary of State for Energy to take sole Ministerial responsibility and that he should look to the Health and Safety Commission for policy advice and the preparation of legislation, as in the case of nuclear safety. This could be achieved by a revision of the existing agency agreement between the Health and Safety Commission and the Department of Energy.



4. We feel that the Group's proposal offers a useful re-definition of Ministerial responsibility in what is a difficult area, and accordingly seek your approval to the formal transfer of Ministerial responsibility for offshore safety inspection from me to the Secretary of State for Energy.

5. On 28 March 1980 during the debate in the House on the collapse of the Norwegian oil rig "Alexander Keilland", the hope was expressed that the House would have an opportunity to discuss the report of Dr J H Burgoyne (Cmnd 7866) "Offshore Safety". I understand that it is hoped to arrange for this debate to take place in the week beginning November 3 which would be the only convenient opportunity in the near future. This would be the appropriate occasion for the transfer of responsibility to be announced; it would not be sensible to have the debate if it cannot. Since, if the debate is to be held next week, it will need to be announced in this week's business statement, it would therefore be very desirable if you could approve the proposed transfer by Thursday morning. I am sorry that the time is so short.

6. I am copying this to David Howell, George Younger, Nicholas Edwards, John Nott and Sir Ian Bancroft.

J P

28 October 1980

28 OCT 1980

