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BRITISH TRANSPORT DOCKS BOARD

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Prime Minister

To me.

I have acknowledged.

18/4
18th 18th
Sea Prime Minister

18th April, 1980.



HULL FISH DOCKS

I understand that you will shortly be receiving a deputation from Hull for a further discussion on the consequences of the collapse of the Hull Fishing Vessel Owners' Association. In view of the publicity there has been recently on this subject, much of it ill-informed and misleading, I think I should write to inform you of the main facts.

In 1974 the fish landing facilities at Hull were re-constructed by transferring them to the Albert and William Wright Docks, which were modernised with the help of grants from MAFF and EEC. The rest of the capital was provided by the Board. At the time we expressed strong doubts as to whether there would be a continuing demand for fish landing facilities at Hull, in addition to the newly modernised fish dock at Grimsby, but the fishing industry insisted that both ports should be re-equipped. At the same time we were determined that the fishing industry should cease to be a heavy financial drain on the rest of the ports users, and this is why we insisted on a new commercial agreement with the HFVOA.

The agreement with the Fishing Vessel Owners' Association provides for charges to be based on the cost to the Board of providing fish landing facilities, and the industry's expectations as to the amount of fish to be landed. It was the industry's pessimistic view of landings which led to the high charges calculated earlier this year, in response to which HFVOA decided to go into liquidation.

The present position is that the industry has increased its estimates of landings, and the Board has adjusted charges accordingly, these to remain in force until the end of this month. Charges thereafter will be reviewed monthly, taking account of the industry's performance and future expectations.

Clearly, there must now be uncertainty about the future of fish landings at Hull. Contrary to what has been suggested, it is not the Board's intention to close the dock if there is enough fish to provide a sound basis for keeping it in operation. But as you know the Board is a commercial undertaking operating in a competitive industry. We cannot subsidise the fishing industry, or any other customer. If the Board were to agree to uneconomic charges for fish landings, our commercial customers at Hull would in effect be being asked to subsidise the fishing industry.

Naturally, the Board hopes that a substantial change in the fortunes of the fishing industry will remove the present uncertainty. But you will appreciate that in the absence of such a change the Board is bound to consider this whole issue in strictly commercial terms.

I am sending copies of this letter to Sir Peter Baldwin at the Department of Transport and Sir Brian Hayes at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

*Yours sincerely,
Kempsey Brune*

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
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London, S.W.1.