

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES
AND FOOD AND THE FRENCH MINISTER OF TRANSPORT - LONDON:
25 JANUARY 1980

Present: The Minister
Minister of State
(Commons)
Mr Moss)
Mr Kelsey) MAFF
Mr Waters)

Mr Le Theule (French Minister
of Transport)
Mr Brossier } French Ministry
Mr Landrieu } of Transport

Representative of French
Embassy, London

FISHERIES

1. Mr Buchanan-Smith said that British Ministers were grateful for the useful discussion that had taken place between officials on 24 January about issues important to the negotiation of a revised Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). He suggested that the Ministerial discussion should cover the approach to the following week's Fisheries Council and to succeeding Councils.
2. Mr Le Theule replied that the next Council was likely to be short and unproblematic. More important was the question of whether British and French medium term aims would diverge. Mr Buchanan-Smith said that the United Kingdom hoped for successful progress on the few items on the agenda of the next Council. In particular, progress on catch reporting and total allowable catches (TACs) would be welcomed. Much work had been done on these points since the last Fisheries Council.
3. Mr Buchanan-Smith said that he expected the Commission to table definite proposals for TACs at the next Council. If progress could be made on these, quotas could be discussed at a later stage. He asked Mr Le Theule whether he thought that progress could be made on the TACs.
4. Mr Le Theule replied that the main point of the TACs was to conserve and rejuvenate the stocks. The aim should be to safeguard "real fishing" so that fishing for industrial species did not spoil stocks for human consumption. Certain Scandinavian countries removed all the fish while they were fishing for industrial species. He was aware that discussions had been taking place on this point.
5. Mr Buchanan-Smith agreed that the main use of fish should be for human consumption. The United Kingdom had discussed the point with Denmark. In any discussion of quotas, absolute priority should be given to fishing for species for human consumption. However, it was important to decide on the TACs before starting to talk about quotas.
6. Mr Le Theule repeated that fishing for industrial species tended to destroy fish stocks: but he accepted that agreement should be sought first on TACs. As for these, he noted that

France had reservations in respect of Greenland shrimps and of saithe. Otherwise, as the Anglo-French discussions had shown, the United Kingdom's views of the TACs were not very different from those of France.

7. Mr Moss explained that the latest Commission proposals on TACs had not been studied by officials in their discussion the day before. The proposals themselves had only issued on that day. He suggested that British and French officials might compare notes about them. It seemed that the United Kingdom could broadly accept the Commission proposals on TACs, although France would regard saithe as important for socio-economic reasons. He hoped that France would understand that the United Kingdom regarded North Sea cod, haddock and whiting in the same light.

8. Mr Le Theule concluded that there was little conflict between the United Kingdom and France over the TACs, though the interests of the two countries might overlap in certain places. The bilateral official discussions had served their purpose in enabling these questions to be studied calmly. He said that he would like a similar meeting in France in a few weeks' time, and that he would like to avoid conflict between France and the United Kingdom in the Council of Ministers.

9. Mr Walker said that he would like the next Council to make progress on the TACs in order to reach broad agreement and thus take another step towards settlement of the CFP. He said that he would like to take advantage of Mr Le Theule's offer of a meeting in France before the next Council. If the Council could make real progress on TACs and catch reporting, then things would be moving in the right direction. Mr Le Theule said that he had not seen the proposals for the next Council, but he agreed that TACs should be tackled, taking account of his reservations on Greenland shrimps and saithe. He suggested that Mr Brossier should discuss the proposals with his British colleagues on Monday 28 January.

10. Mr Walker asked whether there were any problems over catch reporting. Mr Buchanan-Smith hoped that the initial problems had now been smoothed out. The United Kingdom had no particular difficulty with the Commission proposals and he asked if France did. Mr Le Theule said that certain minor points of detail needed resolution. Mr Buchanan-Smith argued that catch reporting was vital to conservation, but could not be applied until quotas had been set.

11. Mr Le Theule thought that conservation could be achieved through either TACs or catch reporting. The precise point of the introduction of catch reporting could be discussed now, but the arrangement would have real meaning only when the quotas were set. Accordingly, there was no problem over catch reporting.

12. Mr Moss asked whether France agreed that the mechanism for catch reporting should be decided on a common basis as soon as possible after TACs had been introduced. Mr Le Theule replied that it would be logical to agree on this point after TACs had been introduced.

13. Mr Buchanan-Smith suggested that it would be useful for the Council to give general guidance to the Commission on the next stages of negotiation, which would consist of access to waters and quotas. Mr Le Theule thought that the role of the Commission had become far too important. The Commission was issuing far too many directives. The Council should indicate its wishes more clearly to the Commission. Progress would be easier if Ministers could reach agreement amongst themselves beforehand. Mr Walker readily agreed with Mr Le Theule. He was anxious to preserve the long term future of the fishing industry and feared that Governments would come under pressure from their fishermen to agree to over-exploitation of the stocks. Such short term considerations were popular with fishermen and politicians.

14. Mr Le Theule said that he had been surprised when he met groups of French fishermen to find that they had good relations with British fishermen. It was clear that they understood each other and had common interests. He could not see many points where the interests of French and British fishermen diverged. He thought it necessary to maintain a good atmosphere between France and the United Kingdom. A difficult time lay ahead, but it should prove possible to reach agreement. British and French fishermen faced the same problem of conservation of stocks. Ministers needed to be able to tell their fishermen what lay at the end of the two or three years of difficulty that they would have to suffer. It served no purpose to block agreement. Attempts should be made to find common ground.

15. Mr Walker said that he was sure that this analysis was right. British fishermen had talked with French fishermen and had agreed certain objectives on prices and imports from third countries. Clearly, there had been much discussion and considerable agreement had been reached between French and British fishermen. If progress was to be made on the CFP, Ministers must discuss what shape it should take to meet the needs of their own fishermen. In this way, they could steer through to a final result instead of merely reacting to Commission proposals.

16. Mr Le Theule agreed with these remarks. The discussion between officials that had taken place the day before had been useful in identifying areas of disagreement and means of resolving these. He hoped for three or four such meetings every six months. He said that Britain and France should try not to show any disagreement at the next Council. In that context, he asked if the United Kingdom would lift its reserve on the Guinea-Bissau agreement, which - he said - was of no importance to the United Kingdom.

17. Mr Walker explained that the Guinea-Bissau agreement was of political importance only. If progress could be made on the TACs and catch reporting, he would be able to justify to British fishermen the lifting of the British reserve on the Guinea-Bissau agreement; otherwise, he could not. Mr Le Theule understood this point. He said that there were no real problems over catch reporting and that officials could continue to discuss the TACs, where some minor problems were left.

However, some deep seated differences remained and it would be miraculous if these could be solved overnight. In the longer term, paper agreements which did not solve the underlying differences were neither useful nor credible. France was prepared to wait six to seven months to see if a change of relationship with the United Kingdom could be achieved. Obviously, there were other difficult and delicate questions.

18. Mr Walker asked Mr Le Theule for his view of Spanish demands. The United Kingdom view was that the Community should be tough and realistic in response to Spanish demands. Mr Le Theule said that his feeling was that the Community should be very prudent and therefore very tough. The Spaniards had recently contacted him but he had given no answer. The Spanish Prime Minister had attempted to speak with the French Prime Minister the day before about fishing in the Gulf of Gascony. Fortunately, Mr Barre had not been available. The pressures would undoubtedly mount however. Mr Le Theule promised to be very prudent with the Spaniards and not to surrender anything in his meeting with the Spanish Minister. He promised to keep Mr Walker informed, if he wished, of his talks with the Spanish. He admitted that Spanish access would cause problems for France.

19. Mr Walker suggested that it would be useful if the United Kingdom and France could agree on the number of fishing licences to be issued to Spain before the Council the following week. Spain wanted two hundred fishing licences. The Spanish Minister of Agriculture had pressed this point in his recent visit to the United Kingdom, and the Spaniards had been contacting Foreign and other Ministers all over Europe. The Spanish Ambassador to London had asked to see him later in the day. The British view was that the Spanish fishermen were notorious for failing to obey fishing rules. It would be dangerous, therefore, to give them too many licences. As France and the United Kingdom shared the same position, it would be useful if the two countries could agree a common approach.

20. Mr Buchanan-Smith added that the Commission was not always right, as Mr Le Theule had said. The Commission had been pressing for more fishing licences to be issued to Spain, as had certain countries, such as Germany, who were friendly to Spain. Mr Le Theule agreed. Firmness was needed with the Spanish despite their imminent Election. He had given instructions to his officials that they should not concede anything for the moment to Spain. Mr Brossier and Mr Kelsey could discuss this point further on the morning of the Fisheries Council.

21. Mr Walker said that the United Kingdom had been told that the matter of two hundred fishing licences was very important to the Basques. However, enquiries that we had made of our Ambassador to Spain indicated that fishing was not a major factor in the Basque Region. The issue of Basque separatism was simply being used in negotiation. He suggested that Mr Le Theule might like to seek the views of the French Ambassador to Madrid.

22. Turning to the longer term, Mr Buchanan-Smith suggested that discussions should focus on quotas, access and conservation measures. Progress would be easier if TACs and catch reporting

had first been successfully tackled. He suggested that discussions on quotas, access and conservation measures should proceed together because the issues were inter-connected. Officials should discuss these points as soon as possible if the Council went well the following week.

23. Mr Le Theule said that he was not absolutely convinced that these points needed to be discussed together. They could be discussed separately on the clear understanding that they all formed part of one package which would have to be judged as a whole. He agreed that a date for further discussions should be fixed. He repeated that he would like officials to meet in Paris the next time and suggested that the time should be decided immediately after the following week's Council meeting, before which further contacts should take place.

24. Finally, Ministers agreed that the exposure of differences between the United Kingdom and France at the Fisheries Council hindered progress. It was better to seek agreement beforehand.

G R Waters

G R WATERS
25 January 1980

Mr Packer + 1

cc Miss Rabagliati
Mr Steel
Mr Sadowski
Mrs Brock
Mr Moss
Mr Kelsey
PS/SOSFA
PS/SS Scotland
PS/SS Wales
PS/SS Northern Ireland
PS Cabinet Secretary
Mr Cormack - DAFS
Mr Alexander - 10 Downing Street ✓

28 JAN 1980

