

PRIME MINISTER

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Agree that had President should be asked to take in this co-ordination?

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Ref. A09565

PRIME MINISTER

No - make Trade MAP 17/  
the responsible departments - and let John N. & K.  
do up research on  
issues. The com. is  
report to G.

Co-ordination of Maritime Affairs

This minute seeks your instructions on how the co-ordination of maritime affairs should be handled at Ministerial level. This is an area in which many Departments have interests and responsibilities, for example, Department of Trade (shipping and marine pollution), Department of Energy (offshore oil and gas), Department of Industry (deep sea-bed mining), Ministry of Agriculture (fisheries), Ministry of Defence (hydrography, protection), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Law of the Sea negotiations) and several others. Moreover increasingly policy questions have arisen which require a co-ordinated response from Her Majesty's Government, e.g. the European Commission's recommendation that member states consider extending their territorial seas to 12 miles; anti-pollution measures; continental shelf delimitation and the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference. On all these matters there are powerful lobbies in Parliament and elsewhere outside Government.

2. One possible arrangement is co-ordination by a single lead Department, e.g. the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the Department of Trade. But this would be difficult because departmental interests frequently conflict and no single Department has the expertise to handle the whole range of maritime matters. The alternative of a single Maritime Ministry would pose still more difficulties, since decisions on maritime affairs can not readily be separated from wider aspects of departmental policies.

3. Under the previous Government the Lord Privy Seal was given responsibility for co-ordinating the handling of maritime affairs. This arrangement worked well in practice. It adequately met the need for co-ordination without impinging on the responsibilities of Departments for their own policies. You may therefore wish to consider continuing with it. If so, I suggest you should ask the Lord President of the Council to take on the task. He will need a small committee of Ministers representing the Departments concerned,

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which should report to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee. The Secretariat would be provided by the Cabinet Office. In view of wide Parliamentary and public interest in this subject, it would probably be advisable to announce the Lord President's appointment, as was done by the previous Government. If you agree, I will consult the Lord President about the way this can best be done and submit a further recommendation to you.

  
(John Hunt)

16th May, 1979