

PRIME MINISTER

*Earlier submission
is at Flag A.**Content with**Sir J Hunt's proposal to
use Cabinet Office machinery
reporting to SoTS for Trade?
Yes OMB. MAD 3/1/79*

Ref. A09884

PRIME MINISTER

Handling of Maritime Affairs

In response to my minute of 16th May (your Private Secretary's minute of 18th May) you decided that:-

- (i) you did not want to appoint a co-ordinating Minister for maritime affairs; and
- (ii) you wanted the Department of Trade to do this on a lead Department basis.

2. No problem arises over (i) though there may be protests from the maritime lobby (the Kennets etc.) when the decision becomes known. I have however run into some difficulty in trying to devise arrangements for (ii). This is because there are a number of maritime matters on which the Department of Trade is not in the lead and where it would be very difficult indeed to put it in the lead. Obvious examples are negotiations at the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference and on maritime delimitation, for both of which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office provide the lead and the legal expertise, and security of offshore oil rigs which is primarily the concern of the Department of Energy. On these and some other maritime matters, other Departments would be very resistant to seeing the Department of Trade in the lead. I think however we can get round this difficulty if at official level we maintain an existing group under Cabinet Office chairmanship on which all Departmental interests are represented and if we provide that in future this group should report to the Secretary of State for Trade who would call meetings of his colleagues as required. The Cabinet Office would service these meetings. I think this is consistent with your wishes that at Ministerial level there should be a lead Minister: and if so I will make arrangements accordingly.

J. Hunt

JOHN HUNT

2nd July, 1979