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Prime Minister

LONDON FLOODING

*Agreed out*

PRIME MINISTER

*Mr Whitelaw reports on the (overdue) review of contingency plans. Its main value has been to identify gaps, and inform Dept's of their roles.*

*Agree new arrangements?*

*MAD 25/11/44*

Earlier this year our predecessors concluded that a review was needed of the contingency arrangements for dealing with a serious Thames flood. Though recognising that the risk of such a flood was relatively slight, they considered that it was nevertheless desirable to ensure that there was a clear understanding of the responsibilities of Departments and other authorities in the event that a flood took place, and that once such responsibilities had been defined the necessary contingency planning should be put in hand.

Accordingly my predecessor, as Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Unit, arranged for a working group of officials of all Departments concerned to be set up to consider these problems and make recommendations. The working group's recommendations are that the Department of the Environment should accept major responsibility for liaison with the Greater London Council and other local authorities over their contingency arrangements, and should in fact take on the role of "lead Department" in connection with action required by the Government; that the Civil Service Department should undertake a review of the plans of individual Government Departments for maintaining essential services in the event of a flood; and that the responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture for flood defences and the warning system and of the Ministry of Defence for providing Services assistance to the Greater London Council and the London Boroughs, would remain unchanged.

With one exception these recommendations have been endorsed by colleagues. The exception is that the Minister of Agriculture would prefer to withdraw from exercising policy control over flood defences and the flood warning system. I am arranging for

/this proposal to be

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this proposal to be further studied. Meanwhile the Ministry have agreed to continue to fulfil the functions in question on a provisional basis. The next flood season begins in August, and I would be glad to have your agreement to my now promulgating the agreed new arrangements, while making clear that Peter Walker's outstanding point is under study. I will then arrange for the Civil Contingencies Unit to follow up with Departments, as appropriate, the consequential action which will be required.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Defence Secretary, the Lord President, the Minister of Agriculture, the Secretary of State for the Environment and Sir John Hunt.

*Wallo*

25 July 1979