

cc/RTA  
(by agreement with  
D'En)  
AT 18/4

BIF via RTA submission.

17/4

PRIME MINISTER

Following the talks that you had with Ian MacGregor recently Robert Armstrong wrote to my Permanent Secretary on the question of opencast coal.

I am very concerned about this because there is no doubt that a political element has entered into local authority decisions about opencast sites, and that there are some Labour Councils who look upon opencast as being non-NUM competitors to deep mines. They could certainly impede our progress with developing our opencast resources.

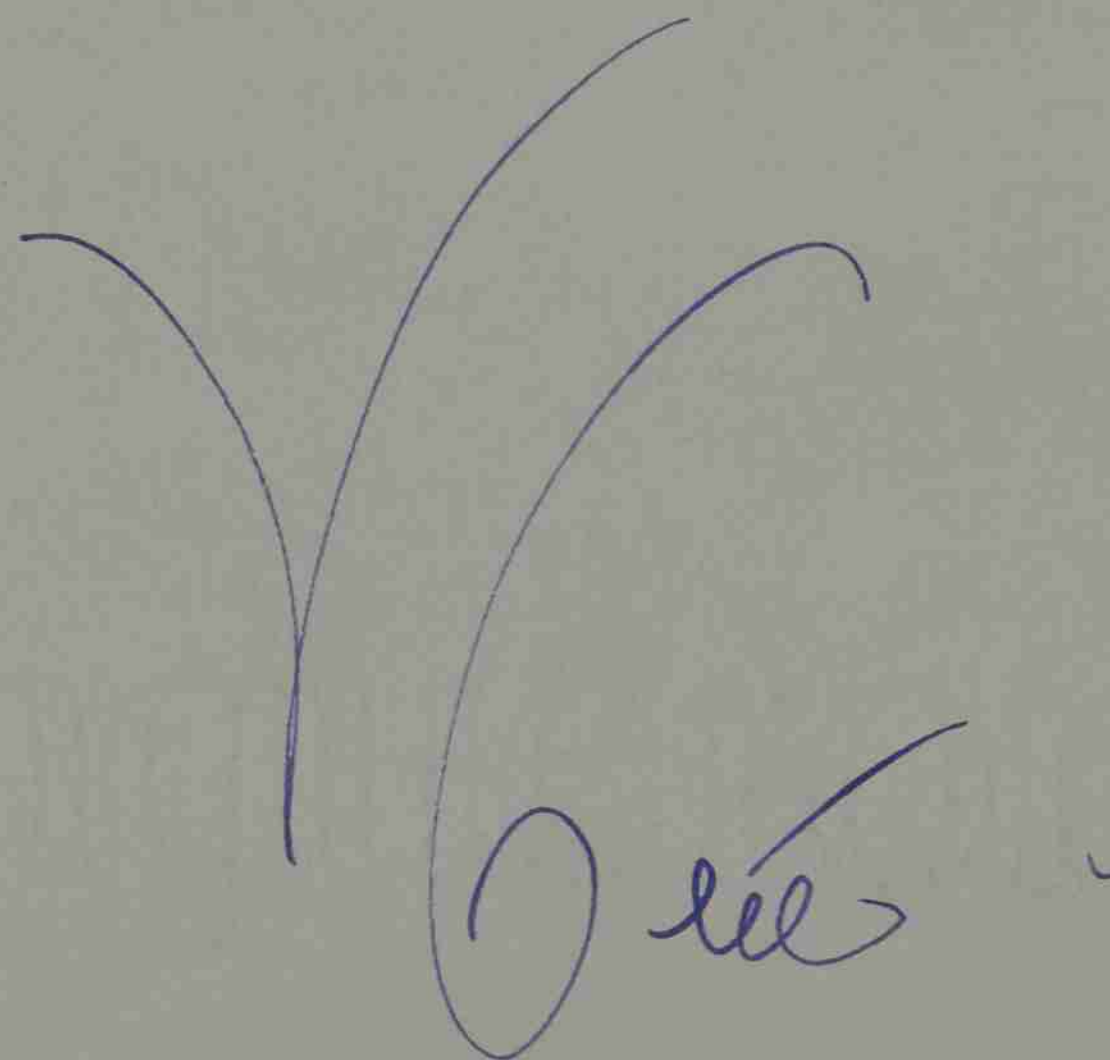
Alas, a decision was taken to transfer responsibilities for planning permission from my department to the Department of the Environment. The process was transferred to that Department but the authority for them to have the responsibility has not yet obtained statutory authority as there has been no time in the Parliamentary timetable to bring in the Opencast Coal Bill.

Ideally, I would like to have the planning powers but to announce that we were transferring them back to my department and that we would not proceed with the Opencast Coal Bill would create an impossible position for Patrick Jenkin with the environmental lobby. As a former Secretary of State for the Environment my own judgement is that it would be an intolerable position for him.

What, therefore, I believe we need is for you to have a private chat with Patrick and myself in order that he will operate his

planning powers in a manner in which plenty of consents will be given in those areas where opencast coal mining is taking place and where there are many more sites to be developed.

Unless he does this there will be a considerable down-turn in opencast production in each of the next three years and that is not in our interests financially or in terms of security of supply.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several large, sweeping loops and a final flourish.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY

17 April 1985