



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD  
WHITEHALL PLACE, LONDON SW1A 2HH

From the Minister

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State  
Department of Transport  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON SW1P 3EB

*Handwritten:* 18/1

18 January 1985

*Handwritten signature:* Peter Nicholas

Thank you for your letter of 9th January. I was very interested in your remarks about a new system of aid which would encourage farmers not to grow grain.

The distinction which you draw between allowing land to revert to nature as against reversion to more traditional forms of farming is not however one that is easy to translate into practice. There is in fact very little purely "natural" habitat left in the UK and good conservation usually calls for positive management of land which is actually being farmed in one way or another. Arrangements for management agreements between the statutory conservation agencies and individual owners and occupiers are, therefore, an important feature of the Government's policy under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. They provide for long-term agreements designed to secure the sympathetic management of land of high conservation interest, perhaps the best examples being those between the Nature Conservancy Council and farmers in Sites of Special Scientific Interest. No doubt Patrick Jenkin can tell you more about this type of arrangement if you wish.

As to the encouragement of the more traditional types of farming, we have already recognised that an approach along these lines would be valuable. Accordingly we have proposed that the draft EC Structures Regulation, currently under discussion in Brussels, should contain specific provisions allowing Member States to pay aids to encourage farming methods sympathetic to the environment in suitably designated conservationally-sensitive areas. Our proposal has not so far had the support in Brussels that it deserves, but I am still hopeful that it will be accepted. In practice, the implementation of such measures in the lowlands would typically mean assistance to traditional grazing livestock systems in areas where more intensive forms of agriculture, notably cereal-growing, are threatening either the wildlife or the landscape. Farmers would

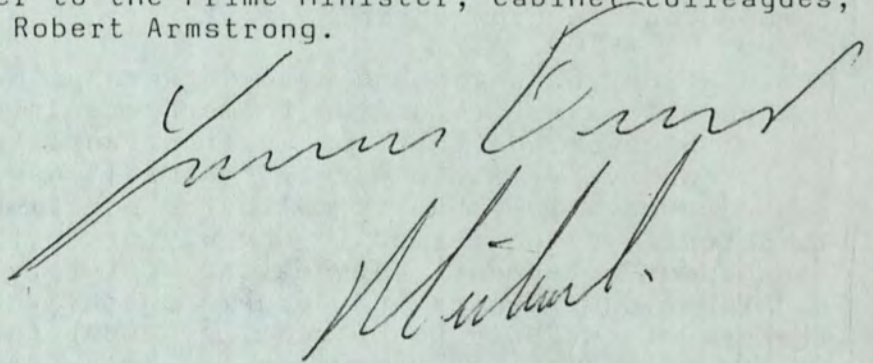
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have to meet certain conservation conditions to be eligible for these grants, and we would be aiming for a lasting effect in the areas concerned. This approach is of course in line with your own ideas.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Cabinet colleagues, the Chief Whip and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Erskine".

MICHAEL JOPLING