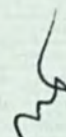


PRIME MINISTERAGRICULTURE AND RURAL EMPLOYMENT (ALURE) 

The positions taken so far are:

- E Chief Secretary: premature to announce measures now and why is agriculture different from any other industry
- F Mr Ridley: very sceptical
- G Mr Channon: also sceptical; but relax planning restrictions
- H Lord Young: relax planning restrictions

The main papers you need read are the Policy Unit note and David Williamson's brief (flags A and B) and Mr Jopling's minute at flag C. His minute at flag D has attached a letter from Emma Nicholson.

David Williamson's brief is admirable. His discussion of the proposed strategy document (paragraph 13), is carefully phrased. He is not yet convinced about the wisdom of publishing a document. It would identify the areas likely to be worst affected, leading to extra pressures from them. Also, farmers are never satisfied. The document could simply stir them up more than ever.

May I offer a personal comment?

One of the proposals is to double the rate of planting of private forestry. 70% of the trees, and probably more, would be conifers. The land to be used for planting is at present mostly pasture.

I view this prospect with horror and I believe many other people would share that view. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but few would regard massed ranks of conifers as an attractive sight from a distance. They are also dreary to be

in. They provide a poor environment for wildlife. And they are believed to contribute substantially to water acidification in the longer run.

Conifers are having a dreadful effect on the landscape in Wales and Scotland. I understand that as much as a fifth of the magnificent flow country of Caithness and Sutherland has now been ploughed for planting. The proposal relates generally to lowlands: conifer planting could be more, not less, sensitive there.

It is no answer to say that the present landscape is anyway manmade. So it is. But that does not in itself justify any degradation we care to inflict on it.

DN

DAVID NORGROVE

11 November 1986

CAJAJK