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SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

EUROPEAN SUMMIT BRIEFING - ACID RAIN

I cannot stress too strongly the danger of making concessions to the German line on acid rain at the European Summit. I wholly endorse the Department of Environment brief which stresses the major scientific uncertainties and completely unknown cost-effectiveness of so-called "solutions" to the problem.

2. I accept that there are times when scientific uncertainty has been reduced to a low enough level for it to be sensible to take action despite the remaining possibility of poor cost-effectiveness. (The recent Government decision on lead in petrol is a good example.)

3. Action on acid rain is still a very long way, probably many years, from this position. The scientific uncertainties are very substantial and there are few signs yet that current research is reducing them. Possible "solutions" to the problem could be found to be totally ineffective. Thus we are so far from being able to assess cost-effectiveness as to be virtually at the 'pot-luck' stage.

4. The UK can wholly support calls for 'action' in so far as they relate to more and better research and to better transnational co-operation in research.

5. But an immense commitment to capital and revenue expenditure in the UK, with small chance of any worth while result, would result if we were to support the German line for 'action' on statutory reductions in emissions through the fitting and retro-fitting of equipment in plant and vehicles emitting sulphur and nitrogen oxides.

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RBN
ROBIN B NICHOLSON

cc: Mr Gregson
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