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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

31 August 1984

Dear Lord Kenech.

Thank you for your further letter of 10 August about the Falkland Islands and Argentina.

I assure you that we share the concern expressed by conservationists and others about the depletion of fishery stocks around the Falkland Islands. We are looking hard at all the options. It is a very complex subject, and we must be careful to avoid measures whose effects would by far outweigh any short-term benefit, in terms either of preservation of fish stocks or of financial benefit for the Islanders.

We had certainly hoped that moves towards the general normalisation of our bilateral relations with Argentina would improve the outlook for progress on the fisheries problems and in other areas. I must emphasise that we had not been contemplating a bilateral arrangement with the Argentines, as had been incorrectly suggested in the press; but a more constructive approach in Buenos Aires towards relations with Britain could, we would hope, be helpful in the area of fisheries conservation. There is regrettably little sign of such an approach at the moment: I explained to you in my letter of 27 July how the Argentines reduced the normalisation talks in Berne to deadlock.

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You are quite right to point out the absurd state of affairs that would result from taking to its logical conclusion the Argentine claim to sovereignty over the Falklands, based on its claim to possession of the Islands in 1820 (a date when, incidentally, neither we nor any other foreign power recognised the Government in Buenos Aires). We have indeed drawn attention to this fact at the United Nations in the past. I enclose a copy of the speech Sir John Thomson, our Permanent Representative in New York, made to the General Assembly in last year's debate on the Falklands issue. You will see from this that in making clear that for successive British Governments the dispute over the Falklands has largely been about people, and not territory, Sir John pointed out that the 150 years of continuous British occupation of the Falklands went back beyond the foundation of many of the states represented in the General Assembly. Citing one of the cases that you mention, he recalled that the United States had acquired both Texas and indeed California quite some years after our continuous occupation of the Falklands began.

Yours sincerely
Raymond Shalton

The Lord Kennet