

CCP



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

From the Minister

CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Downing Street
London SW1

CAD
23/1

23 January 1986

FALKLANDS ISLANDS: FISHERIES

I have been giving thought to your minute of 17 December to the Prime Minister on this subject together with the draft papers prepared by the ad hoc interdepartmental group of officials. Unfortunately I have only just seen the letter of 19 December from 10 Downing Street, the original copy of which was not received in my office. I would nevertheless like to comment, while recognising that I have no direct Departmental responsibility in respect of the Falklands fisheries.

My officials have of course been closely involved with the preparations, on a contingency basis, for the policing arrangements and operational procedures should it be decided to declare an extended fishing limit and a unilateral management regime around the Falklands. As you mention in para 7 of your minute, certain UK fishing companies have been at the forefront of the pressure for a unilateral regime. None of these companies are currently fishing in the South Atlantic although they may see some prospect of profitable involvement in the catching side were a unilateral conservation and management regime to be introduced. The main interest of the UK fishing industry, as you have pointed out, is in maintaining the complex bartering arrangements currently used to pay for sales of fresh herring and mackerel by our (mainly Scottish) pelagic fishermen to the East European factory ships: these involve squid caught in the South Atlantic by East European vessels and delivered to Far Eastern markets and there is a fear that if Far Eastern catches of squid increase these arrangements will break down. The interest of the UK fishing industry in the

/ management of fisheries ...

management of fisheries round the Falklands is thus indirect and limited.

Having made clear the limited nature of my interest, I do nonetheless have to register some unease about the present situation and the continued reliance on the multilateral approach, which, as you point out, will not bear fruit before the 1987 fishing season at the earliest. I understand that efforts are being made to secure voluntary restraint by Japan and South Korea but I fear that this may well not be forthcoming in practice.

I have to say that, objectively speaking, unless we get a clear commitment to restraint by the main fishing countries the multilateral approach does not now seem to me to measure up to the extent of the immediate conservation problem as identified by Dr Beddington of Imperial College in the report which you commissioned from him. He has advised that the stocks are already fully or over-exploited at the 1985 level of fishing and that, as you mention in your minute, there are indications that the number of vessels fishing for squid this coming year is liable to increase dramatically. Were I and my colleagues the other UK Fisheries Ministers to receive scientific advice of this kind about stocks in our own waters we would I think find it very difficult to resist the conclusion that immediate action to prevent the growth of fishing effort was required. I would add that the experience of fisheries management nearer home amply confirms that, if action is not taken before the increased effort has materialised and become established, it will be difficult, if not impossible, in practice to get effort back to a sensible level again short of the total collapse of the stocks.

I do of course recognise that immediate recourse to unilateral action would involve difficulties and risks for our Falklands policy generally, which I am not in a position to evaluate. But I felt it right to bring to your attention and that of colleagues the worries that I have about the situation.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, to members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong

James E. ...
Michael

MICHAEL JOPLING

