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THE PRIME MINISTER

22 August 1986

My dear Lord Shackleton,

Thank you for your letter of 31 July expressing concern at the prospect of Argentina signing a bilateral fisheries agreement with the Soviet Union and other fishing nations.

We will certainly have to look very carefully at the implications of the Soviet/Argentine agreement, as regards both the chances of achieving a multilateral conservation and management regime and our jurisdiction over Falklands waters. As I said in my letter of 9 July, we had been aware for some time of these negotiations, and made our position clear to the Soviet Government on a number of occasions; indeed Geoffrey Howe took the matter up with Mr. Shevardnadze in July. When the signature of an agreement was reported in the press, our Embassy in Moscow asked for a copy of the text and for an assurance that the agreement did not infringe our rights under international law. The Russians have still not responded adequately, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office put out a statement on 13 August reserving our position (I enclose a copy). Our Embassies in those countries with an interest in the South West Atlantic fishery are also bringing our statement to the attention of their host governments.

I understand the arguments which you make for our declaring our own unilateral fishing zone. As Janet Young said in reply to your question in the House of Lords on 29 July, we retain our right to do this. But if we can achieve it, a multilateral management regime under FAO auspices makes good sense in seeking conservation

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arrangements for migratory fish stocks in waters where sovereignty is disputed. The FAO technical study of the fishery should be ready in September. This will offer an authoritative guide to the state of the fish stocks and indicate whether special protection measures are required. We will need to give the FAO study careful consideration.

I think it would be wrong to contemplate a major change in our approach until we have all the facts. But you need have no doubt that we are monitoring the situation very
closely.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

The Rt. Hon. Lord Shackleton, K.G., O.B.E.

STATEMENT BY NEWS DEPARTMENT: SOVIET/ARGENTINE FISHERIES
AGREEMENT

On 29 July the Soviet and Argentine Press reported that the Soviet Union and Argentina had signed a bilateral fisheries agreement in Buenos Aires on 28 July.

We do not yet know the precise scope of the agreement. HM Embassy in Moscow have asked the Soviet Government for a copy of the text. But HMG wish to make it clear that if this agreement purports to regulate fishing activity in the waters surrounding the Falkland Islands, it would have no basis in international law. British sovereignty over, and administration of, the Falklands confers on the British Government and the Falklands authorities the right to exercise fisheries jurisdiction over these waters. This right remains unaffected by the Soviet/Argentine fisheries agreement or any other bilateral fisheries agreement.