



PRIME MINISTER

GENERAL LIGHTHOUSE AUTHORITIES

On 18 June last I put to you a proposal that there should be an independent inquiry into the affairs of the three General Lighthouse Authorities (Trinity House, the Northern Lighthouse Board and the Commissioners of Irish Lights) following wide-ranging criticisms made by representatives of the shipowners, who meet the costs. You thought, however, that this would lead to the setting up of a new expensive bureaucracy which would cost far more than the three existing bodies.

I did not pursue the question then because the Public Accounts Committee were about to examine it and I wished to hear their conclusions. The Committee reported in September, and were highly and indeed pungently critical. They found it anomalous that the Department of Trade have general responsibility for marine safety and specific responsibility for the General Lighthouse Fund, but no power to appoint the Authorities or to regulate the management of the lighthouse services themselves; they saw a need for a fundamental review of the lighthouse services and of the financial and accounting arrangements; they endorsed the need for investigation of the criticisms made by the shipowners; and they were not satisfied that the Department of Trade have adequately exercised their responsibilities for the scrutiny of the Authorities' staffing levels, estimates and comparative efficiency.

I now propose action to meet these criticisms, and the Treasury Minute responding to the Report will accept the need for an investigation. I have met the Chairmen of the Authorities and told them that I envisage a firm of management accountants being jointly commissioned to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the Authorities', and the Department's, financial and management control arrangements; the terms of reference will be decided after further consideration with the Authorities. I will then use my existing powers in so far as they stretch that far to require whatever changes appear necessary in the light of their report.

*This will cause
immense trouble
who has made what
mistake?*

*Prime Minister 1
Agree that Lord
Cockfield should accept
the need for an investigation
and invite the Lighthouse
Authorities' views on the
adequacy of his powers etc?
MCS 13/12*



But there remains the question whether my powers in relation to the Authorities really are adequate. This bears also on their constitution and their membership. Changes in this area, if they were required, would entail legislation and could well prove difficult. As a first step I have invited the Authorities' views on the criticisms made by the PAC in this respect.

While, therefore, I will do everything that can be done within the ambit of my present powers I suspect that it is the inadequacy of these powers which really underlies the criticisms that the PAC have levelled at the effectiveness of the Department's control. If the lighthouse authorities are co-operative we may be able to solve the difficulties. But if they prove stubborn, legislation will be the only answer.

The matter of the anomalous relationship with lights in the Republic of Ireland criticised by both the shipowners and the PAC is already being pursued in direct talks with the Irish Government.

Since HRH The Duke of Edinburgh holds the office of Master of Trinity House I have written to his Private Secretary to inform him broadly of what action I am taking.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Lord Chancellor, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Northern Ireland and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A. C.

LORD COCKFIELD

Department of Trade
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1

13 December 1982

Govt Machinery - General Light House D. Thakur

...

3 DEC 1982

11 12 1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8 9
10