



Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Whitehall Place London SW1A 2HH

CF: I have told MAFF that I do not intend
to reply to this letter, to which I
take exception.

From the Minister's Private Office

David Barclay Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
London SW1

10 July 1984

Done
11/7

Dear David

OFFICIAL REPRESENTATION AT MEETINGS AT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
(AGRICULTURE)

1. You spoke to Valerie Heathorn recently about the size of the MAFF delegation for the Agriculture Council on 18/19 June. You suggested that our delegation seemed excessive especially in comparison to the size of delegations for Foreign Affairs Councils. I believe there are a number of relevant factors which you may not have taken fully into account and it might be helpful if I explained the position as we see it.

2. Perhaps the central point is that work in the Agriculture (and Fisheries) Councils is different in kind from that in Foreign Affairs most or all other Councils. In the Agriculture Council there is relatively little exchange of views on generalities. Rather discussion normally concentrates on specific detailed texts which, when adopted, will have direct effect on our national interests and on the livelihoods of UK citizens. This reflects of course the fact that there is genuinely a common Community policy for agriculture reaching right down into the detail, but the degree of integration in other sectors is much less. It follows that the nature of discussions in the Agriculture Council is such that detailed textual points often arise which have major financial and other implications; such is the complexity of the subject matter Ministers and senior officials cannot be expected to cope unaided with the mass of detail involved. Unfortunately the Community's method of working is such that it is by no means unusual (and happened in several instances at the 18/19 June Agriculture Council) for new texts incorporating substantial detailed revisions to be available only at the meeting itself. Secondly, any Council is likely to have on its agenda a number of disparate items, each with their own technicalities. To give a specific, and by no means exceptional, example, the agenda for the Council on 18/19 June covered agricultural structures, olive oil, sugar, marketing standards for eggs, veterinary issues and harmonisation of legislation on animal feedingstuffs. Thirdly an issue discussed in the Council often has to be followed up by the relevant officials either in working groups or in Commission Management Committee Meetings and it is also not uncommon for working groups to meet in the margins of the Council - this again happened on 18/19 June.

/3. Among other

3. Among other points which are relevant are the following:-

(a) For one or two day EC meetings in Brussels/Luxembourg the major direct cost to public funds of official attendance is represented by travel which is reimbursed by the Community. If we were unilaterally to cut back on the number of our representatives attending meetings we would only secure a small amount of the saving proportional to our marginal contribution rate to the EC budget, while we would continue to pay our full share of the cost of travel of all other delegations;

(b) Although we have not been able in the time available to secure detailed figures from the Council Secretariat, we are sure that the level of UK representation at Council meetings is comparable with (sometimes below) that of the French, Germans and Italians who have similarly wide interests; indeed our impression is that the Dutch representation also is often at a level similar to ours;

(c) Frankly our information does not confirm that only one or two officials from London normally attend Foreign Affairs Councils as I believe you suggested to Valerie Heathorn. Attendance from London at the recent Luxembourg Foreign Affairs Council was certainly larger than this, and included two other Ministers with supporting officials from their own Departments. Be that as it may, a comparison between attendances of London-based officials at Foreign Affairs and Agriculture Councils would not seem to us to be valid. Quite apart from the different nature of the discussions in the two Councils to which I refer above, the expert for agenda items on the Foreign Affairs Council is often a member of UKREP and therefore does not figure in the delegation list sent to you.

4. I hope I have explained above why in our view discussion in the Agriculture Council is of a different nature to those in other Councils, necessitating greater expert attendance from London, and what we would be placing our Ministers at an unnecessary negotiating disadvantage if we arbitrarily reduced the numbers attending Councils for little financial benefit to the United Kingdom.

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C I LLEWELYN
Principal Private Secretary