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My ref:

nbpm

Your ref:

The Rt Hon John MacGregor OBE MP  
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food  
Whitehall Place  
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8 August 1988

Dear John

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION ORDERS

Thank you for your letter of 20 July.

I have carefully considered your reservations about keeping the question of LCOs under review, but I do not share your fears on this score. A review would not imply any sort of commitment and I shall make it plain that we should require a good deal of persuading to reverse the decision at some future time.

The consultation paper expressed in clear terms the Government's view on the need to strengthen powers of landscape protection and the majority of respondents supported that approach. Their argument was not with the principle but the mechanism we were proposing and it is that dispute which provides a major plank in the case against the introduction of legislation in the current Parliament.

The second argument, that we need to encourage farmers to manage their land in an environmentally sympathetic way rather than regulate their operations, is an important signal of our basic philosophy but we have no new initiative of direct relevance to the National Parks to offer, apart possibly from heather, that might serve to deflect criticism of our decision to abandon a Manifesto commitment. The outcome of your capital grants review could provide persuasive evidence of our intentions but that will not unfortunately be public knowledge until after the National Parks Conference at which I think my announcement should be made.

My reason for that is that the National Parks Conference is the single most important event in the National Park calendar and the audience customarily includes representatives of the CLA and the NFU as well as elected members of National Park Authorities, the voluntary movement, and local authority associations. Everyone with an interest in the LCO decision will therefore be represented and they will be looking for some form of statement



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from me, given that it will be more than 18 months after the closing date of the consultation exercise. I should be open to criticism of cowardice if I said nothing on that occasion but then made an announcement in Parliament soon after the Summer Recess.

I am sure the farming community will welcome the decision; and any fears they may still have from a commitment to keep the situation under review will surely lessen as time passes. I hope, therefore, that you will, on reflection, not press your point.

I am copying this, as before, to the Prime Minister, Peter Walker, Malcolm Rifkind, John Major and other members of H Committee.

*Nicholas Ridley*

NICHOLAS RIDLEY