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From the Private Secretary

3 February 1989

Dear Stephen,

OZONE LAYER CONFERENCE

Thank you for your letter of 2 February about the invitations to the Conference on the Ozone Layer. The Prime Minister has asked whether we really have to invite Libya and Syria. She thinks that people here will simply not understand why it is considered necessary. It would be much better if they could be excluded by one means or another.

Yours sincerely,
Charles Powell

C. D. POWELL

Stephen Wall, Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

2 February 1989

Did we
really have

Dear Charles, to invite Libya Syria?
People will not understand why

Ozone Layer Conference

You may wish to know that preparations for the conference in March are going ahead well. Some 150 countries have been invited to attend and their response has been encouraging. As you know, President Moi has agreed to give the keynote address.

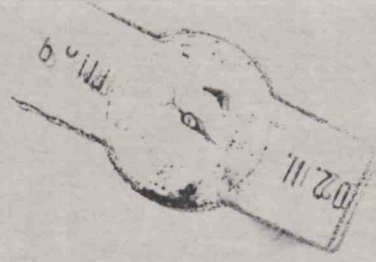
Because the conference is being organised in conjunction with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), we are obliged to invite those countries which are actively involved in UNEP. We followed a similar precedent for the AIDS Conference which took place in London last year. The logical consequence of this is that some countries with whom we do not have diplomatic relations, such as Argentina, Libya and Syria, may attend. Countries which are not actively engaged in UNEP, such as Afghanistan, Albania, Democratic Kampuchea, North Korea and South Africa, will not be invited.

Yours,
Stephen Wall

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Private Secretary

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their own countries for acidification. That resulted in a superb report *Watch with Acid Drops* which was given a prize for its thoroughness, and well worthy of it it was.

I should like to refer to something similar which has been and is being done. An organisation known as the Living Earth Foundation together with the London Centre for International Peacebuilding started an initiative with the Cassia plant. I had never heard of the Cassia plant. It is called *cassia obtusifolia*. It grows in arid and semi-arid regions of the world and is supposed to have nutritious properties which can be a very valuable food supplement. Kew Gardens became interested in that because they knew of it but knew nothing about it. If I may use the expression, it had no biology.

The suggestion was made that some basic research on it was needed. A Ph.D was not needed to do it. Why should not school children do it? A scheme was therefore set up whereby a school in the East End of London, in the borough of Newham, was twinned with a school in Kenya. Together the schools observed the behaviour of the seeds of this plant. It was basic research. All they had to do was see how long the seed took to germinate and how it behaved when it had germinated.

The effect on the children was extraordinary. The interest and motivation of the children in the London school was amazing. They were able to conduct intelligent discussions with the teacher. They were able to form their own hypothesis and do their own testing. By intuitive means they often came up with new ideas—ideas which their teachers had never thought of. That seems to be a most brilliant type of education and is the sort that we want.

The Living Earth Foundation is now extending the idea to the twinning of other schools. A school in Cleveland is being twinned with a school in South Mexico. Another school in Cornwall is to be twinned with a school in Borneo. The object of the twinning is not merely to form pen-pals but to provide each with packs of information based on genuine research done by the children on the spot. It is a pity that when the Chernobyl disaster occurred we did not have the physics departments of the country out monitoring the amount of radioactive fallout. That is the sort of project we want to go for. Children must get out of the classroom laboratory and see things for themselves.

The concern is that the national curriculum is packed so tightly that there will not be time for this sort of experiential work. It is most important that it should happen. There must be some flexibility in the programme, with government support and leadership. There must be co-ordinators in schools to carry out such projects as well as fulfil the demands of the curriculum. Children need to get out and become involved with their surroundings. They need to develop—and this is important—a moral responsibility for their environment and not just knowledge of it. They must feel part of it and responsible for it. The pursuit of knowledge without moral responsibility we all know to be highly dangerous. It is that that has brought us to the brink of the destruction of the human race by the appalling

weapons we have created. It is that, too, which has brought us to the brink of destroying the planet. We cannot have knowledge without moral responsibility, and that is what young people must learn by getting out and discovering the environment for themselves. I hope that that will come in the years ahead.

5.13 p.m.

Lord Crickhowell: My Lords, as chairman of the National Rivers Authority Advisory Committee I am particularly grateful to the noble Baroness Lady Nicol, whose absence we regret, and the noble Lord, Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos, for giving me this opportunity to speak about some of the issues which my committee think are specially important; a number of which were referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady White.

First, may I say as a user of unleaded petrol that the present efforts of the oil companies to make available an adequate supply of unleaded petrol pumps are woefully inadequate.

The Committee I chair is an advisory body and Ministers are entitled to reject our advice. Nonetheless, it is right that we should be open about our views. Ministers have already accepted our advice on a number of issues and have made it clear that on others their minds are not closed. In my opinion the Water Bill will prove to be one of the most important environmental measures yet introduced by a British Government. The framework provided by the Bill is sound but my committee is firmly of the opinion that the Bill and the arrangements that refer to it can be substantially improved.

In the time available to me I shall confine my remarks to a few important topics about which we feel strongly. The first concerns the relationship of the NRA with the Government. While we are broadly satisfied that the Bill gives the authority the range of legal powers that it will need, we think that the NRA should have a wide degree of management independence and should not be subject to the direction of Ministers over individual decisions. I suspect that Ministers would find their involvement in individual cases equally unacceptable. One possible solution is to define in the Bill the areas of activity where directions may not be given.

We agree with the many individual representations that the NRA should be as independent of Treasury funding as is practicably possible. In its first year of operation on present estimates the NRA will be dependent upon the Exchequer funding for £70 million out of a turnover of £290 million. We are convinced that a greater degree of self-financing is both practicable and desirable. It is important that the NRA should have adequate funds to perform its duties effectively. It is also extremely desirable that over a period we should move to a system that provides a real incentive for environmental improvement.

We should like to see a system that enables us to recover as large a proportion as possible of general monitoring costs through discharge consents and abstraction charges. If it is not possible in the short-term to make all monitoring and sampling costs self-

[LORD CRICKHOWELL.]

financing, it should certainly be our objective over a period of years.

To produce a fully worked out incentive charging scheme may well prove difficult, but it is important to recognise that a sound cost recovery scheme can itself have important incentive effects, simply because higher costs arise for approvals for the more polluting and dangerous substances.

I think it is a great pity that the Government have decided so firmly that the environmental services charge must go. Though there would have had to be a change of practice because of the abolition of domestic rates, my committee believes that there might well have been a substantial degree of support for the NRA levying a river management precept or charge for abstracters in order to contribute to the funding of its general pollution control duties.

My third point concerns the relations of the NRA with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, a topic raised by the noble Baroness, Lady White. The NRA is to be the national guardian of the water environment. We regard it as essential that the division of responsibilities between the NRA and Her Majesty's Inspectorate should be clearly drawn. We believe that it should be based on the following principles.

First, there should be absolute clarity as to which organisation customers deal with. Secondly, HMIP should be responsible for assessment of the best practical environmental option, whether to water, land or air, and consideration of the best available technology. Thirdly, the NRA should have an overriding responsibility for determining the conditions for discharging to controlled waters so as to ensure that water quality objectives are maintained.

My fourth area of concern is about sewage treatment works discharges. The technical background to the issue is extremely complex and the arguments that relate to it would delight the medieval theologian more, I suspect, than noble Lords taking part in this debate. They are vitally important, however, because they will decide the effectiveness of the NRA as an environmental control body. They also directly relate to the flotation and financial position of the new plcs.

There is a problem at the present time. A very large number of sewage treatment works do not achieve the standards that have been laid down. There is no way in which that sort of problem can be solved overnight. While we would not accept any permanent relaxation of present standards, we think it right that the water authorities should be allowed time to carry out a programme of major improvements of the kind which the Government have already announced.

However, while this temporary relaxation in specifically agreed cases and within agreed upper limits is acceptable, we feel strongly that a system must be established early in the life of the NRA that will enable it to set adequate standards that treat all discharges, whether they be industrial or concerned with sewage treatment works, even-handedly and which clearly reveal the truth of what is going on. We have told the Government that we do not believe that

the present system which includes so-called look-up tables provides a satisfactory basis for the future. The system allows a relaxation of standards. The protection against statistical quirks is lopsided, increasing the risk of pollution.

However, having said that, we equally understand that there are difficult questions of principle, practicality and timing to be resolved; and my committee is working closely with Ministers to try to solve those problems. It is being argued that to do away with look-up tables would substantially increase the number of non-complying sewage treatment works. There may be some exaggeration, but if there are those consequences it can only be because the present system is disguising an unacceptable level of failure.

The Government need not be embarrassed by what we are proposing. It is now very clear that one consequence of their decisions has been to bring into the open the reality of the state of our sewage treatment works previously disguised by the poacher-gamekeeper relationship within the industry and by the look-up tables' system. The Government are entitled to take full credit for the fact that this has happened. The early introduction of a system that does not disguise the true level of discharges would be a further important step towards the improvement of water quality. My committee would argue that if the facts are clear and if the task is even larger than we know at present, the Government in consultation with the regulators would be fully justified to take account of the availability of resources and the impact on charges in reaching their decision on the scale and timetable of improvements that they can approve. That would reduce and not add to the uncertainties that confront the industry.

There should be no misunderstanding that a robust NRA, with or without look-up tables, will carry out much more extensive sampling. If all doubtful cases are adequately sampled, much of the truth will out. That is why, when all the technical arguments are put on one side, the important fact is that there is to be an NRA. No authority with integrity will allow industry, water plcs or government departments to fudge the issues. That is why the present Secretary of State deserves such credit for what I am confident will prove to be one of the most important steps yet taken to prevent pollution in this country and improve the environment.

5.23 p.m.

Lord Hatch of Lusby: My Lords, on 24th November last year, speaking on the Address to the Gracious speech, I asked the Government a number of questions following the Prime Minister's conversion, in her speech to the Royal Society in September, to what some of us have been saying for a number of years now. I pay particular tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Craigton, for the way in which he has pursued the same issues as I have. For years Ministers have poured scorn on the warnings that we were given.

I received no answers to any of those questions. I wish to repeat some of them this afternoon. On that date I asked the Government what they were going to