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PRIME MINISTER

ENVIRONMENT POLICY

I seek your agreement to the Government publishing a White Paper on the Environment in the early autumn of next year; and to my announcing this at the Party Conference.

The environment is now prominent in both the UK and on the international political agenda. We are under heavy pressure to do more, in an area where it is clearly impossible to satisfy the extremists. Contrary to much public opinion both here and abroad our record is a good one, and great efforts have been made in recent months to publicise it - for example through the 'Saving the Ozone Layer' Conference and the 'Environment in Trust' leaflets. But inevitably our commitment to sound science and economic sense can all too readily - though wrongly - be represented as foot dragging.

In the short term I am confident that the general policies we are pursuing will enable us to get our message across effectively. I have in mind particularly the forthcoming Environment Protection Bill, which will give us a good Parliamentary platform; the follow-up to Professor Pearce's report on the economics of the environment; and our global activities especially on climate change. We must also, in the coming year, keep our environmental leaflets - which have been well received - updated.

But having now taken stock of where we have got to, I am convinced that we must work towards a more comprehensive presentation of our policies if we are not to be unnecessarily upstaged by our opponents. I believe that we must make a rational and coherent statement of policy, which would enable us both to set out our achievements and to develop a programme for the future. Such a statement would be an effective Parliamentary instrument, would spike one of the Green lobby's guns and might serve - depending on how things develop and subject to other legislative priorities - as a precursor to further legislation.

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I would see a White Paper setting out:-

- a. the overall philosophy of the Government on environmental policy (sound science, good economics, precautionary approach where necessary, polluter pays principle, sustainable development, separation of regulator from regulated, wish to build on existing institutions);
- b. factual material on the current state of the environment, with particular reference to success stories and problem areas;
- c. a clear account of our achievements so far (eg. Wildlife and Countryside Act, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, North Sea Conference, Large Plants Directive, cleaning up car exhausts, integrated pollution control, waste policy, litter, water privatisation, National Rivers Authority);
- d. some pointers to the future (eg. global issues such as ozone layer and climate change, commitments already in European Directives, our ideas on economics and market mechanisms, the need to integrate the environment into economic and industrial policy, the role of the consumer and of the individual).

In terms of timing, there is a lot of work to do if this is to be the substantive document I have in mind. It would be sensible to give ourselves time for policy development and consultation with the many colleagues who, I recognise, are closely interested. This points to publication about this time next year, which would also fit well with completion of the passage of the Environment Protection Bill through Parliament. But I believe that I should make an early announcement of our intention to issue a White Paper in order to maintain the political initiative, although of course I would want to do it in such a way so as not to pre-judge or

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pre-empt decisions which are the prime responsibility of other colleagues. The Party Conference is the obvious platform from which to make such a statement of intent.

I suggest that at the same time it would be right to announce an intention to launch next year - probably for publication at the same time as the White Paper - a periodic "State of the Environment" report. This will fit in well with the current EEC discussion on a European Environment Agency to collate Environmental information on all the member states. (In my view we have nothing to lose and much to gain from a comparison of community-wide environmental data which we would insist should be collected on a strictly uniform basis.) In preparing our own Environmental statement, we could build upon the excellent but low key annual Departmental "Digest of Environmental and Water Statistics", perhaps expanded to provide an appropriate science base for the assessment. We would of course need to look closely at the balance between a White Paper and a first environmental report.

I am copying this minute to Cabinet colleagues and Sir Robin Butler.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'CP'.

CHRIS PATTEN

27 September 1989