

Ref: A07019



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Prime Minister

Agree to X & Y below?

MR. COLES

Don't want to set up new groups. We will deal with them in 87. AM 23.12

Handling of Community Fisheries Questions

Until now, and apart from two discussions at OD in October 1979 and March 1981, decisions on issues arising from the Common Fisheries Policy negotiations have been reached at Ministerial level in restricted ad hoc meetings chaired by the Prime Minister.

2. These arrangements, supplemented from time to time by Ministerial correspondence, have worked well until quite recently. But two events in the last few weeks suggest to me that it would be timely to review the efficacy of our co-ordination arrangements in this field. The first was the visit by the Secretary of State for Scotland to Brussels on 1st December for talks with Commissioner Contogeorgis; the second was the Minister of Agriculture's decision to cancel the Fisheries Council which had been fixed for 14th December. Neither was discussed by Ministers collectively in advance, a fact which in the first case has led the Private Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to register Lord Carrington's concern in writing - a copy of his letter of 21st December is attached. Both have given rise to misunderstandings with one or more of our partners.

3. A further and more substantive reason for reviewing the present co-ordinating machinery for CFP matters is that it must now be very probable that the fisheries negotiations will get caught up in the next phase of the mandate negotiations: indeed one could be forgiven for wondering whether the Minister of Agriculture is trying for some reason to achieve that result. It is just possible that further bilaterals with the French could open the door again to an early and separate settlement, but it seems much more likely that the French will feel that the CFP gives them a bargaining counter to use against us at or before the March European Council. As such the Prime Minister might be personally involved in a delicate and sensitive trade off between our budgetary, agricultural and fisheries objectives. By the same token the Chancellor of the Exchequer would also have a clearer interest than now in the fisheries aspects of the negotiations.



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4. For these reasons, I believe that it might be prudent to set up new machinery for handling Ministerial discussion of fisheries questions in the months ahead. I do not think that either OD or OD(E) offer an appropriate forum for discussion of these matters. Both are too large and do not include among their membership the Secretary of State for Scotland; and I assume that OD(E) should in any event be ruled out on the grounds that the Prime Minister would wish to continue to chair these discussions herself. What seems to be needed therefore is a small MISC group of Ministers consisting of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Secretary of State for Scotland with the Prime Minister in the chair. If it was thought desirable, the membership could be extended to include the Lord Privy Seal and the Minister of State at the MAFF (Mr. Buchanan-Smith).

5. I should be grateful to know whether this idea, or some variant of it, commends itself to the Prime Minister. In that event I will put the necessary procedural arrangements in hand.

Robert Armstrong

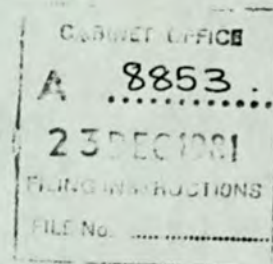
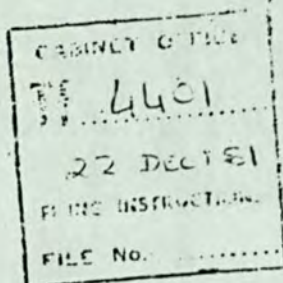
23rd December 1981



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

21 December 1981



Dear Russell,

Lord Carrington understands from a Paris telegram that, following Mr Younger's talks in Brussels, Mr Contogeorgis had so misrepresented the British position that the French were led to say that the British were making un-negotiable demands, and that there was no prospect of progress on the major CFP issues at the Council then due to be held on 14 - 16 December. Given everything we have done to try and keep in contact with the French on fisheries, and to avoid the blame for any breakdown in negotiations, it was a pity that this misunderstanding should have arisen.

Lord Carrington well understands that there is a limit to what we can do to prevent this kind of distortion of statements by British Ministers. But he does feel that it is important that the FCO should be given the normal advance notice of visits of this kind to Brussels and elsewhere; he understands that there was no consultation about the visit outside the Fisheries Department. Fisheries questions are too important and too sensitive in relation to other aspects of our European policy to be treated in isolation; however hard we try to prevent formal linkage from being established, they are inevitably seen by our partners as being closely bound up with other areas of Community activity, and we cannot maintain a coherent approach to the whole range of Community issues unless this Department is fully informed and consulted about our actions and intentions.

We should be most grateful if you could keep us in touch about any further talks you may have.

Yours ever,

(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

A M Russell Esq
PS/Secretary of State for Scotland

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Fishery Ind
VLB

MR. WRIGHT
CABINET OFFICE

Handling of Community Fisheries Questions

The Prime Minister has seen Sir Robert Armstrong's minute to John Coles of 23 December, reference A07019. The Prime Minister is not happy with the suggestion that a new MISC group should be set up to handle Community fisheries questions. She would much prefer these matters to be dealt with in OD.

W F S RICKETT

24 December 1981

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GR