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SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

David Barclay Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

7 November 1983

Dear David,

FISHERY PROTECTION: INSHORE AERIAL SURVEILLANCE

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland uses a light aircraft on fishery protection and enforcement work. My Secretary of State has agreed that the Piper Aztec currently in use should be replaced by a Cessna 404 Titan plane. It is American and currently out of production but the Department expects to be able to obtain a suitable second-hand aircraft in Europe.

An evaluation of the suitability of 9 aircraft on both operational and cost grounds was carried out. The Titan was considered to be the best on both counts.

The runner-up was the Britten Norman Islander which is currently used on similar work by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It has a lower endurance capability (6 hours without refuelling as compared with 8 for the Titan) and the purchase price for a new Islander was given at £440,000 whereas we expect to be able to purchase a two year old Titan for about £250,000.

Mr Stephen Rose MP is a non-executive Director of Britten Norman and may raise this issue with the Prime Minister in Question Time. I am therefore attaching defensive briefing material.

A copy goes to Callum McCarthy at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Yours sincerely,
John S. Graham

J S GRAHAM
Private Secretary

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PURCHASE OF AIRCRAFT FOR INSHORE FISHERIES SURVEILLANCE

Background

1. As part of its fishery protection work the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) undertakes inshore aerial surveillance around the Scottish coast. The Department has been using a chartered Piper Aztec on this task for some but it is too small to carry the necessary personnel and equipment and it is limited in operational range. The Department conducted a lengthy evaluation programme covering 9 different aircraft. The Cessna 404 Titan has proved to be the most suitable aircraft on both cost and operational grounds and DAFS, with the consent of Treasury, proposes to purchase this model.
2. The Pilatus Britten Norman Turbine Islander BN2T was considered but found to be significantly more expensive than the Cessna Titan and also to be less suitable operationally. The company is, however, effectively the only UK manufacturer with an interest in this type of light aircraft although the foreign components (Rumanian and American) are significant. We can therefore expect objections to the purchase of a Cessna Titan. Mr Stephen Ross MP is a non-executive Director of the Company and wrote to the Secretary of State for Scotland in March of this year pressing the case for the Islander. He can be expected to raise the subject again when the decision is announced.
3. The Cessna Titan is not currently in production and a second hand aircraft will have to be acquired. We would expect to be able to purchase one without much difficulty. Such aircraft have a working life of 12 years or more and are subject to maintenance and replacement programmes which make the difference between new and second hand of less significance than in other types of equipment. We would, in any event, be seeking a relatively new plane of around 2 years old.
4. A defensive Question and Answer brief is attached. We have been in touch with the Department of Trade and Industry who have indicated the likely reaction from Britten Norman. DTI have not been involved in the assessment of the relative merits of the aircraft which have been the subject of the evaluation exercise.

PURCHASE OF LIGHT AIRCRAFT BY DAFS

Why is the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland purchasing an American aircraft when a suitable British aircraft is available?

An evaluation was made of the suitability of 9 aircraft. On both operational and cost grounds the Cessna Titan was considered to be the best choice.

The Turbine Islander is suitable for the task and DAFS should be required to support UK industry.

The Cessna Titan has operational advantages over the Islander and is also cheaper to purchase and operate over its anticipated life.

Surely a second hand aircraft is unsuitable for this arduous task?

It is hoped to obtain an aircraft which is no more than 2 or 3 years old. The aircraft currently used on this work is 10 years old. The aircraft that is purchased will, of course, have to have a Civil Aviation Authority Certificate of Airworthiness.