

*Fishing Industry*

SUMMARY RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND A DELEGATION FROM KINGSTON UPON HULL HELD AT 10 DOWNING STREET AT 1630 HOURS ON THURSDAY 24 APRIL 1980

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Present:-

*Subject file*  
*PM - April '80 - Mtg with Cairns,*

The Prime Minister	Mr. J. Prescott, MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Mr. D.K. Cairns, Regional Secretary, TGWU
Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture (Mr. Buchanan-Smith)	Mr. A.S. Cook, Chairman, Hull Fish Merchants Protection Association Ltd
Mr. B. Ingham	Mr. T. Boyd, Chairman, of Humber Freezer Trawler Owners Co. Ltd.
Mr. M.A. Pattison	Mr. R.K. Dalton, Secretary to Humber Freezer Trawler Owners Co. Ltd.
	Mr. P. Doyle, Leader of Hull City Council
	Mr. M. Owston, Chairman of Fish Porters' Committee
	Mr. Holden
	Miss A. Philp, Secretary for the Hull delegation

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The Prime Minister opened by expressing her sorrow on the news of the death of the Lord Mayor.

Mr. Cairns apologised for the absence of the Conservative Members from the area, Messrs Wall and Townend, who were abroad. Since the Prime Minister's visit to Humberside on 14 March, all the City interests had been working hard both to keep their landing facilities alive and to prepare a prospectus to stand up to Ministerial scrutiny. In that period, the various interests had created the basis for a company spanning the industry and political spectrum. Its future existence should be a firm commitment within a week. There had been a meeting with

Canadian representatives, meetings with the City fathers and meetings with the owners and merchants. Major problems still existed over the dockers and de-casualisation. He and Mr. Prescott had had a meeting with representatives of the British Transport and Docks Board (BTDB). They had pressed for an understanding that the landing facility must be kept open over the next two months if there was to be a chance of making Hull a going concern.

Mr. Cairns asked four of his colleagues to explain the position from the view point of their sectors. Mr. Boyd argued that no other EEC fishing port was likely to go out of existence if Hull did collapse before a Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) had been negotiated. The UK negotiating and capital base would be vastly reduced. At present, Britain had very little fishing capacity compared with the Germans and Dutch. Those Governments and others appeared to be turning a blind eye to undertakings and commitments. MAFF had asked for information on cheating which the industry had provided. Further public evidence had become available, for example on the scale of the herring catch elsewhere in Europe whilst it remained nil here because MAFF forbade landings. Ships could not pay without a catch. The French "prosecutions" seemed to be window dressing, with no effect even on those who were prosecuted. Whilst the Government could not change French practice, they must be aware of their style of operation. The British historic catch was fast disappearing given, for example, the growing scale of the Dutch mackerel catch. Imports were pouring in this year destroying the domestic market, and involving much illegal catching. The Government had provided some subsidy, as a result of the sterling efforts of the Agriculture Ministers following their discussions in December and February. But an amount of 10 times the sum provided would have barely been an adequate operating subsidy. It was desperately important to keep open the dock until progress was made on the CFP. If the dock was likely to be closed or made inoperative by high charges, the proposed landing company needed the right to buy it, and Government financial assistance - possibly from inner city development funds - to make the purchase.

/Mr. Boyd

Mr. Boyd concluded that the UK had to date been offered 22 per cent of EEC resources. The value of the UK resources were perhaps £700 million: the EEC would benefit to the tune of £500 million at 1978 prices. With such valuable resources, the UK could reasonably go for 45 per cent of the total resource.

Councillor Doyle stressed the importance of the dock to the City. With 10.6 per cent unemployment the consequences of the closure for allied industries would be enormous. Other fishing centres on the East coast such as Bridlington also had a stake in the Hull fishing industry. Other plans, such as that for a centre for fishing excellence, were dependent on a continuing industry in the City. The City wanted the Government to make sure that the BTDB would give Hull the opportunity to continue operations until the CFP was settled. The tonnage landed since 14 March following a long period of no landings demonstrated the efforts being made in the City. The City were looking at the Fleetwood experience in running a fish landing company. The Council had no particular wish to get involved in such activities but had to look at all possibilities. This would be pursued during Lord Bellwin's visit the next day, in the context of inner city policy. The Council ought to be able to find some money but might need additional loan finance. They wanted an undertaking that all possible assistance from the Department of Industry and other Government sources should be available.

Speaking from the perspective of the fish merchants, Mr. Cook said that marketing had become shaky in Grimsby and Fleetwood since Christmas. This was partly the consequence of imports and it was also partially the result of the absence of Hull landings. Fish marketing throughout the country was inter-linked: the smaller ports in Scotland relied on Hull as a cross-roads in their trade. A continued landing facility in Hull was essential especially in handling the peaks and troughs of the trade. The money required in the short term was relatively small.

/Mr. Prescott

Mr. Prescott, speaking across Party lines, emphasised that the issue was whether a landing facility continued to exist until June, regardless of whether there was a significant catch. Up to March, the Hull landing charges had been five-times those of Grimsby. In his view BTDB saw Hull as non-viable and intended to close it. He saw that judgement as the foundation of the problem. The April landings to date were well on the way to meeting estimates submitted by Hull, not those originally taken by BTDB. Hull was not simply asking for money. They had been making their own efforts, but with no landing facilities these efforts could not succeed. They recognised all the difficulties of resolving CFP issues by the end of June, but they had lived with these for some-time. But to remain in the game they must have a landing facility.

Following these initial presentations, the Prime Minister recognised that the basic issue was whether there would ever be enough fish to land at Hull. She had now had approaches from Fleetwood and Grimsby. She had been in touch with Sir Humphrey Browne of BTDB. He had explained the charging basis originally used. She understood that these had now been significantly revised, to be only slightly above those of Grimsby. The deputation reemphasised the problems caused by the month by month uncertainty of the charging basis.

In discussion of the <sup>UK</sup> problem of illegal fishing, Mr. Buchanan-Smith pointed out that the/ could do little when the prosecutions were the responsibility of another country: nor could we claim that cheating was unique to other countries. Nevertheless, the German authorities had levied heavy fines which were having some effect. Only a CFP would bring about effective policing and other European countries were now recognising this. The next stage of the discussion would be on quotas. He hoped that this would get under way in May and detailed Commission proposals were awaited. There was no certainty that the negotiations would be concluded in June, but the June date was important because by then there should be an indication of whether a CFP settlement was likely, thus allowing those in the industry to begin to plan on a realistic basis.

/In further discussion

In further discussion, the Prime Minister noted that the April landings figures seemed likely to allow a continuation of the dock on the current charging basis for at least another month, and that the forecast of 7,000 tonnes of white fish landings in May offered the prospect of continuing through June. Although the deputation recognised that June would not in itself resolve their problems and that there were many other outstanding difficulties, there did seem to be a possibility of meeting their minimum target. She believed that Sir Humphrey Browne had been trying to be helpful, and she did not accept that he had been inconsistent or high-handed. She would write to him again, saying that she had seen the delegation and had been impressed by the resolve of all interests. She would say that she hoped it would be possible to maintain the landing facility through to June. In the meantime, she would expect the various interests to press fiercely within the Producers Organisation to get the maximum share of available funds.



24 April 1980