

Fishing Ind.

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Ref. A0485

PRIME MINISTER

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The Common Fisheries Policy: Next Steps

(OD(79) 34)

BACKGROUND

Under the previous Administration, the Community negotiations on a CFP reached an impasse, mainly because we were insisting on a dominant access preference outside 12 miles and on the lion's share of the future growth of fish stocks. The Government's policy hitherto has been to continue to regard the CFP negotiations as seamless, and not to negotiate on individual elements such as conservation for fear of weakening the United Kingdom's position on access preference and quotas. After extensive talks with the industry and the other member States, the Fisheries Ministers now believe that we should be ready to negotiate a separate conservation agreement, in the interests of conserving stocks and that this approach would not diminish our leverage on other aspects of the CFP. They still regard access and quotas as needing to be negotiated together, and propose that we continue to withhold our agreement to separate negotiations with third countries as a negotiating lever.

2. We are at present in dispute on conservation with the Danes over the North Sea pout box, and with the French over nephrops in the South-West. The Minister of Agriculture believes that a settlement with the Danes may be possible after their Election. The French have so far refused to talk but a meeting has now been arranged for the morning of the next Fisheries Council on 29th October.

3. On objectives for a CFP (paragraph 2) the Fisheries Ministers believe there is to be little difficulty in negotiating a control system enabling us to police our own waters and some improvement in our share of quotas compared with existing Commission proposals. That leaves access. We should be able to negotiate an adequate exclusive zone (within 12 miles), subject to the continuance -

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temporary or permanent - of a minimum level of historic rights especially for the French in the South West. But they do not believe it possible to achieve a further zone beyond the exclusive zone which gives preference to the coastal state. They propose instead a preference based on local fishing communities or on quota shares (or some combination of the two). This is probably a realistic assessment of the negotiating possibilities.

HANDLING

4. You may wish to invite the Minister of Agriculture to introduce the memorandum, and the Secretary of State for Scotland to add his comments. Thereafter, the discussion might be ordered as follows:-

- (i) Does the Committee agree with the assessment that it suits our interests for a conservation package to be detached from the rest of a CFP? Is this likely to be acceptable to the industry? Will a readiness to negotiate a conservation package be enough to keep fish off the agenda of the Dublin European Council? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary may wish to comment on our position under impending Court judgments, which may be expected to erode our existing national measures and our powers to take new ones. The Secretary of State for Defence may wish to comment on whether a Community regime would be easier to enforce than our national measures.
- (ii) How far can we compromise with the Danes over the pout box or the French on mesh sizes consistently with the scientific advice?
- (iii) What line should be taken at the 29th October Fisheries Council on access preference beyond the exclusive zone? The Minister of Agriculture might explain more fully than in paragraph 11 what he has in mind. Does the Secretary of State for Scotland agree?
- (iv) The previous Government insisted that we should get a preferential share of any growth in fish stocks. Is this still our objective?
- (v) How and when should Parliament be informed of the Government's negotiating stance? The Scrutiny Committee has recommended a debate.

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CONCLUSIONS

5. Subject to the discussion, you may be able to sum up that the Committee endorses the general approach of the paper; agrees that at the forthcoming Fisheries Council we should show readiness to negotiate on Community conservation measures in advance of an overall CFP settlement and that the Fisheries Ministers should have some discretion to try and settle with the Danes and the French on the issues in current dispute. The details could if necessary be settled in OD(E). The terms on which we might ultimately be able to settle the remaining CFP issues will need to be considered later. The Minister of Agriculture should arrange for an early Parliamentary debate.

(John Hunt)

23rd October, 1979

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