

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr George Foulkes (La/Co - Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley):

145 To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information he has about a collision between a Norwegian fishing boat and a French Agousta class submarine off Shetland on Monday 22nd May; what inquiries have been carried out into the collision; and if he will make a statement.

MR MICHAEL PORTILLO

During the afternoon of 22 May HM Coastguard Rescue Centre in Aberdeen received a report that the nets of the Norwegian trawler STRAND SENIOR had been fouled by a French submarine. Coastguard established that the trawler was in no danger.

The reported position of the incident was 40 miles North North West of Unst and thus well outside United Kingdom Territorial Waters. Any further investigation is therefore for the French and Norwegian authorities.



THE DEPARTMENT  
OF TRANSPORT

FROM THE MINISTER FOR AVIATION AND SHIPPING

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My Ref: C/T/PSO/7634/89

Your Ref:

16 JUN 1989

*George Foulkes,*

Thank you for your letter of 25 May to Paul Channon on fishing vessel disappearances.

It might be helpful if I outline how inquiries into such occurrences are conducted. Investigations into the loss of British vessels are undertaken by marine surveyors from this Department. I can assure you that thorough and exacting investigations are carried out by those inspectors, both to establish the nature and cause of a particular loss, and to make recommendations on how recurrences could be avoided in future.

When the missing craft is foreign, the primary responsibility for inquiry is with the Flag State, and in most cases a full investigation will be conducted. On occasion the Flag State may request that this Department undertake an investigation on its behalf. Again, should a casualty occur to a foreign vessel in United Kingdom waters, the investigation will generally be mounted by this Department.

Unfortunately, despite these painstaking investigations it will sometimes be the case that the cause of the loss is uncertain. This is due to the almost inevitable paucity of evidence when a ship of any type disappears without trace. Since, in practice, all plausible causes of loss are considered during an inquiry, re-investigation would serve no useful purpose, unless new and important evidence had come to light since the original inquiry.

You also raised the issue of future investigations. As you will be aware, the investigation of marine accidents involving merchant ships or fishing vessels will shortly become the responsibility of a separate section - the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB). The MAIB, like the Air Accident Investigation Branch, will report directly to the Secretary of State. We certainly intend that under the new arrangements losses of fishing vessels will continue to be fully and rigorously investigated.

/ I am copying this letter to Bill Walker MP.

Yours sincerely,  
Peter [unclear]

THE LORD BRABAZON OF TARA

## NATIONAL FINANCE

### Government Bonds

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of the early repurchases of Government bonds since the April Budget.

**Mr. Lilley:** Q2 figures will be published in the August *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*. Net transactions, including redemptions, for March and April are published in table F of the Bank of England's monthly monetary statistics.

### Value Added Tax

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the operation of the value added tax cash accounting scheme; and whether he has any plans (a) to adjust the turnover level of £250,000 to take into account changes to the retail prices index and (b) to review the level of the threshold.

**Mr. Lilley:** The cash accounting scheme was introduced on 1 October 1987 and is available to businesses with an annual taxable turnover not exceeding £250,000. It is used by about 60,000 businesses. Customs and Excise have recently consulted representative bodies and small businesses to consider all aspects of the scheme with the aim of improving take-up. The views of those who responded are currently being considered and the outcome of the consultation will be announced in due course. The existing turnover limit is significantly higher than that originally proposed and required the formal agreement of the European Commission. Any further increase would also have to be approved by the Commission.

### Privatisation (Debt Repayment)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the individual amounts of debt repayments written off in each of the privatisations and sale of Government assets since 1979 and the aggregate of these write-offs.

**Mr. Norman Lamont:** The normal practice on privatisation of a nationalised industry or company wholly or majority owned by Government is to repay, rather than write off, debt. This repayment may be financed from the company's existing resources, the injection of new equity or new debt finance. In some cases the Government have provided the finance to repay debts, for example, by an equity injection.

National loans fund debt has been written off only in the cases listed in the table, totalling £3,014,662,728. These write-offs had no direct effect on public expenditure since they represented a reconstruction of the balance sheets of the industries concerned. In each case, having had NLF debt written off, the successor company issued new equity or debt securities to be held by the Secretary of State as assets on the consolidated fund pending realisation.

Year and Company	Amount £
1980-81	
National Freight Corporation (under Section 45 of the Transport Act 1980)	100,000,000
1982-83	
British Transport Docks Board (under Section 6(1) of the Transport Act 1981)	81,293,616

Year and Company	Amount £
1984-85	
British Telecom (BT Extinguishment of Loans Order 1982)	2,789,865,772
1986-87	
BAA (under section 3 of the Airports Act 1986)	43,503,340

## TRANSPORT

### Rail Electrification (Birmingham)

**Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received a letter dated 16 May from the chairman of the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority seeking a meeting between him and a delegation of members of the authority to discuss the electrification of the Birmingham cross-city railway line; and if he will meet such a delegation in the near future.

**Mr. Portillo:** I have agreed to meet the chairman of the West Midlands PTE when I have had BR's formal submission on this scheme.

### Pedestrian Safety

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost of the major research programme designed specifically to help identify further ways of reducing pedestrian casualties to which he refers in his pedestrian safety proposals published in April.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** The cost of the research programme referred to in the Department's leaflet on pedestrian safety is roughly £1.6 million in the current year. It is likely to increase next year.

Over 40 per cent. of the current figure is being spent on research aimed primarily at pedestrian safety. The remainder will benefit pedestrians along with other road users.

### Fast Rail Link

**Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the terms of reference and time scale to which private interests will need to work in order to bring about the construction of British Rail's proposed fast rail link from the Kent coast to London.

**Mr. Portillo:** These are matters for British Rail to discuss with the private interests concerned.

### Birmingham North Orbital Route

**Mr. Richard Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those private companies who have approached his Department in connection with alternative methods of finance for the Birmingham north orbital route; and the date of their first approach.

**Mr. Portillo:** Some approaches have been made but these must remain commercially confidential.

### MV Majestic

**Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 June, *Official*

Report, column 550, to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley relating to MV Majestic, what further details he has of the nature of the underwater obstruction referred to.

**Mr. Portillo:** The investigation is continuing. It is known that the nets caught on an obstruction on the sea bottom but the nature of the obstruction has not been determined.

### Road Traffic Law

**Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to bring forward legislation to implement his proposals in "The Road User and the Law".

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** Legislation will be brought forward as soon as parliamentary time is available.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Timetable Motions

**Mr. Richard Shepherd:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if, further to his reply of 16 March, *Official Report*, column 311, he will list the further occasions on which the Government have introduced the guillotine this Session.

**Mr. Wakeham:** The information requested is as follows:

#### Allocation of time order

Bill	
Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland)	3 May 1989
Dock Work	8 May 1989

## WALES

### Medical Physicists

**Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he intends to take on the problem of medical physicists leaving National Health Service hospitals in south Wales.

**Mr. Peter Walker:** The number of medical physicists—whole-time equivalents—employed by health authorities in Wales over the past four years is given in the table. The management side of the Scientific and Professional Staffs Council is currently investigating the recruitment and retention of scientists, including medical physicists, within the NHS generally.

In Wales, medical physicists have been included in staff groups designated for detailed scrutiny as part of the 1989 manpower resource planning exercise being undertaken by all district health authorities under the auspices of the manpower steering group, established by my Department, with the intention of examining manpower requirements over the next 10 years. Those plans will also examine wastage and recruitment rates for the purpose of identifying potential staffing difficulties and to enable action to be taken at the local or all-Wales level to forestall problems. Work is also in hand by the manpower steering group on a study of medical physics and bio-engineering in the NHS in Wales, which will address the question of staff retention, particularly in the area of equipment management.

Health Authority	WTE as at 30 September			
	1985	1986	1987	1988
Clwyd	5.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
East Dyfed <sup>1</sup>	—	—	—	—
Gwent <sup>1</sup>	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd	2.0	2.0	4.0	3.0
Mid Glamorgan <sup>1</sup>	—	—	—	—
Pembs <sup>1</sup>	—	—	—	—
Powys <sup>1</sup>	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	37.0	37.0	34.0	32.0
West Glamorgan	11.0	10.8	12.8	15.7
Wales	55.0	53.8	54.8	53.7

<sup>1</sup> Medical physics services for these authorities are provided by the relevant departments in the four authorities which do employ medical physicists.

### Water Shortages

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* the outstanding capital projects and their estimated cost throughout Wales proposed by the Welsh water authority which plan to alleviate dry weather water shortages; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each of the years since 1979 and giving their cost, all those capital projects of the Welsh water authority which have been initiated to guard against water shortages as a consequence of dry weather;

(3) if he will list those areas in Wales where water supply levels give cause for concern; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will make a statement concerning water shortages in Wales consequent upon the current heat wave and the Welsh water authority's banning of water hoses and sprinklers in all areas.

**Mr. Peter Walker:** No. This is a matter for the Welsh water authority.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Unleaded Petrol

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the effectiveness of the Government television advertising campaign on unleaded petrol.

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** In a survey conducted during the week commencing 21 April, 60 per cent. of those interviewed, when prompted, were aware of the advertisement. This put it in the top 10 TV advertisements most remembered by the public.

The advertisements ran from 1 to 14 April and were shown on all commercial TV stations in the United Kingdom. It is estimated that 76 per cent. of all adults had the opportunity to see them at least once and 33 per cent. at least four times. On average the target audience of all motorists responsible for purchasing petrol had four opportunities to see the advertisement.

The unleaded petrol share of the market has increased dramatically from 6.4 per cent. in March to 19.3 per cent. in May.