



DAIL ÉIREANN
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH, 2.
(Dublin, 2).

21st April 1989.

Phone 789911 ext 554.

J.B. Moffatt,
Celtic League,
21, St. Germain's,
Peel,
Isle of Man.

RE: Nuclear Submarines in the Irish Sea.

Dear Mr. Moffatt,

Thank you for your recent correspondence and all of the information contained. I look forward to our continued contact as the information you have available would be valuable to any debate in the Parliament here on safety at sea, particularly the Irish Sea.

Arising out of your recent correspondence, Tomas MacGiolla T.D. Of the Workers' Party, amongst others tabled questions to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and I enclose a copy of the Dail Extracts for the 19th April 1989 for your information and attention.

I would welcome your comments and observations. Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor pat McCartan T.D.
The Workers' Party.

encl.

QUESTION NOS. 12, 19 & 39

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CHUN AN AIRE GNOTHAÍ EACHTRACHA : TO ASK THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

TO ASK THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN VIEW OF THE LEGISLATION PASSED BY THE HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS ESTABLISHING IRISH JURISDICTION OF THE SEAS WITHIN A 12 MILE LIMIT, IF HE WILL MAKE A STATEMENT ON THE USE OF THESE TERRITORIAL WATERS BY SUBMARINES POSSIBLY CARRYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS; IF HIS ATTENTION HAS BEEN DRAWN TO THIS PROBLEM; THE NUMBER OF TIMES THE IRISH LIMIT HAS BEEN BREACHED; AND THE STEPS HE PROPOSES TO TAKE TO ENSURE THAT THESE OCCURRENCES WILL CEASE. - MICHAEL D HIGGINS.

FOR PRIORITY ANSWER ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH APRIL 1989.

TO ASK THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WHETHER THE PRESENCE OF NUCLEAR-POWERED SUBMARINES IN THE IRISH SEA WAS RAISED DURING THE RECENT VISIT OF PRESIDENT GORBACHEV TO THIS COUNTRY; WHETHER AN ASSURANCE WAS SOUGHT, AS A MATTER OF URGENCY, WITH REGARD TO THE SAFETY OF FISHING VESSELS, THAT SOVIET SUBMARINES WOULD AVOID THE IRISH SEA; AND IF HE WILL MAKE A STATEMENT ON THE MATTER. - GERALDINE KENNEDY

FOR ORAL ANSWER ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH APRIL 1989.

TO ASK THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS IF, IN VIEW OF THE DANGERS HIGHLIGHTED BY THE RECENT ACCIDENT INVOLVING A SOVIET NUCLEAR SUBMARINE OFF THE COAST OF NORWAY, THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO TAKE ANY INITIATIVE THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS OR OTHER APPROPRIATE BODY TO HAVE ALL NUCLEAR SUBMARINES BANNED FROM THE IRISH SEA; AND IF HE WILL MAKE A STATEMENT ON THE MATTER. - TOMAS MAC GÍOLLA

FOR ORAL ANSWER ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH APRIL 1989.

DRAFT REPLY

I WOULD PROPOSE TO ANSWER PRIORITY QUESTION 12, AND QUESTIONS 19 & 39 TOGETHER.

IN MY ADDRESS TO THE UN THIRD SPECIAL SESSION ON DISARMAMENT IN NEW YORK IN JUNE 1988, I AVAILED OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE IRELAND'S CONCERN ABOUT THE GROWTH IN NUCLEAR SUBMARINE TRAFFIC IN BUSY COASTAL AND FISHING ZONES, SUCH AS THE IRISH SEA, AND OF THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS POSED BY SUCH NUCLEAR POWERED VESSELS IN THE EVENT OF ACCIDENT.

THE SPECIFIC QUESTION OF SUBMARINE TRAFFIC WAS NOT RAISED IN DISCUSSIONS WITH PRESIDENT GORBACHEV AT SHANNON. HOWEVER I DISCUSSED WITH HIM THE QUESTION OF NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AND UNDERLINED IRELAND'S FIRM COMMITMENT TO THIS GOAL. IT IS CLEAR THAT MOVEMENT TOWARDS NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT COULD HELP REDUCE THE NUMBER OF NUCLEAR SUBMARINES OPERATING IN THE IRISH SEA AND ELSEWHERE. THE RECENT INCIDENT INVOLVING THE SOVIET NUCLEAR SUBMARINE OFF THE COAST OF NORWAY HAS HIGHLIGHTED THE POTENTIAL RISKS POSED BY SUCH SUBMARINES.

THE SAFETY OF IRISH FISHING VESSELS AT SEA HAS LONG BEEN A MATTER OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO THE GOVERNMENT. AS THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAS PREVIOUSLY INDICATED TO THE DAIL, THE

GOVERNMENT HAVE BROUGHT THIS ISSUE TO THE ATTENTION OF ALL CONCERNED THROUGH THE CHANNELS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANISATION (IMO) WHERE WE SPONSORED AN INITIATIVE AIMED AT FOCUSING ATTENTION ON THE PROBLEMS POSED TO FISHERMEN BY SUBMARINE TRAFFIC. THE IMO IS THE INTERNATIONAL BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR SAFETY AT SEA. THE INITIATIVE RESULTED IN THE UNANIMOUS ADOPTION BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE IMO OF A RESOLUTION ENTITLED "AVOIDANCE BY SUBMERGED SUBMARINES OF FISHING VESSELS AND THEIR FISHING GEAR". IT IS OUR HOPE THAT THESE EFFORTS WILL MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE AVOIDANCE OF INCIDENTS INVOLVING SURFACE VESSELS AND SUBMERGED SUBMARINES AT SEA.

IRELAND'S TERRITORIAL WATERS NOW EXTEND TO TWELVE MILES FROM OUR COAST. UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW, VESSELS, INCLUDING SUBMARINES, OF OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE A RIGHT OF INNOCENT PASSAGE THROUGH THESE WATERS WITHOUT NOTIFICATION - PROVIDED, IN THE CASE OF SUBMARINES, THAT THEY TRAVEL ON THE SURFACE AND FLY THEIR FLAGS. THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HAS NO RECORD OF TRANSITS OF THIS KIND BY SUBMARINES WITHIN OUR TERRITORIAL WATERS DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

INTERNATIONAL WATERS BEGIN AT THE EDGE OF OUR TWELVE MILE TERRITORIAL LIMIT. VESSELS OF ALL NATIONS, INCLUDING SUBMARINES, HAVE FREE ACCESS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW TO THESE WATERS AND WE

HAVE NO RIGHT TO BAR OR LIMIT THEIR ACCESS OR TRANSIT. WHILE THEREFORE, I SHARE THE DEPUTIES' CONCERN ABOUT THE DANGERS WHICH NUCLEAR SUBMARINES PASSING THROUGH THE IRISH SEA COULD POSE, I HAVE TO SAY THAT IN THE PRESENT STATE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO BAN SUBMARINES FROM INNOCENT TRANSIT ON THE SURFACE THROUGH OUR TERRITORIAL SEAS OR TO BAN OR LIMIT IN ANY WAY THEIR PASSAGE THROUGH SEAS WHICH, BEYOND OUR TWELVE MILE LIMIT, ARE REGARDED AS INTERNATIONAL WATERS. I WOULD HOWEVER APPEAL TO THE SENSE OF INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COUNTRIES WHICH OPERATE SUCH SUBMARINES. I WOULD ASK THEM TO UNDERSTAND THE DANGERS WHICH THEY CAN CAUSE TO INNOCENT SURFACE VESSELS SUCH AS FISHING BOATS; AND, AT A WIDER LEVEL, THE EXTREMELY GRAVE DANGERS WHICH COULD FOLLOW AN ACCIDENT INVOLVING A NUCLEAR SUBMARINE IN A NARROW BODY OF WATER SUCH AS THE IRISH SEA.

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