

Metric Culprits

Just who are the people who would have us all "go metric"? Who do they represent? What are their motives? BWMA reveals some of the answers in this rogues' gallery of busybodies, bureaucrats, boffins and cowboys.



The British Standards Institution

Where it all began: grey people in a grey building, located in London W1. In May 1962, the BSI issued a statement declaring that the metric system was "essential and inevitable". The BSI laid down a date by which we would all be metric - 1982.



The Competition and Consumer Affairs Directorate at the Department of Trade & Industry

The Competition & Consumer Affairs Directorate is responsible for metric policy in Britain. We would like to name the current minister but they pass, conveyor belt-like, through the department so quickly that this page would be constantly out of date. To ensure the metric gospel is heard as widely as possible, leaflets are produced in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese, Welsh and even in English. Visit the [DTI's internet page](#).

Consumer & Competition

Policy Directorate

STRENGTHENING CONSUMERS AND BUSINESS



United States Metric Association

Formed in 1916 to turn the United States to the metric system, USMA seeks change by building networks with pro-metric elements within the US government and indoctrinating the US population into believing that they alone in the world use non-metric units.



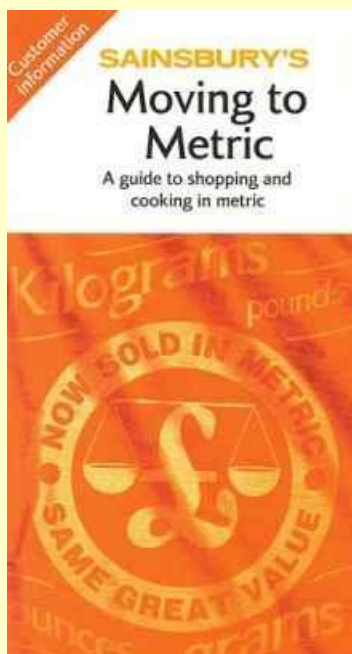
UK Metric Association

The Metric Moriarties to BWMA's Sherlock Holmes, this society is determined to turn Britain into a metric-only country. It has close ties with its sister organisation in the United States. Their patron and guru is Lord Howe (see below).



One Metre - the Canadian metric lobby

Canada's move to metrics ground to a halt in 1983 when the government issued a Moratorium suspending compulsory metric conversion. Since then, it has been Canada's policy not to enforce the country's Weights and Measures Act requiring that metric be more prominent than traditional units. As a result, retailers continue to price and sell fruit, vegetables, meat and other weighed items in imperial units. Metric equivalents are offered only in tiny print. The purpose of One Metre is reverse the Moratorium, thereby compelling retailers to display metric units more prominently than imperial units. *One Metre* notes, "Without enforcement, the completion of metric conversion will never happen". Quite.



J Sainsbury Plc

Sainsbury's Supermarket supports metric conversion because it can afford the conversion costs that its smaller competitors cannot. Sainsburys is also a metric downsizer. Whereas a pack of Sainsburys Four Rich Puddings used to weigh "4 x 4oz (113gr)", they subsequently weighed "4 x 100gr" with no price reduction. This meant prices had risen by 12% in real terms, despite signs in Sainsburys reading, "All Christmas puddings at same price or cheaper than last year".



The Metrication Board 1969 - 1980

The Metrication Board with its staff of 67 was set up in 1969 to oversee Britain's transition to metric. It could only advise and had no powers to compel - but it did nothing to inform its targets of this limitation. The Metrication Board produced reports in [1977](#) and [1980](#).



Britain's Metrication Board had equivalents across the Commonwealth: Metric Commission Canada (1971-1980).

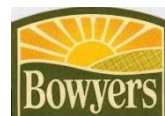


Australia: the Metric Conversion Board (1970-1981).



New Zealand: the Metric Advisory Board (1969-1981).

The Unholy Alliance: Government, Cronyism, Big Business



Hailed by the government as its vehicle for cutting red tape, the [Better Regulation Task Force](#) was assigned to tackle legal anomalies

Christopher Haskins was the chairman of the Better Regulation Taskforce, a rather convenient arrangement because he was also the chairman of

Northern Foods are among the big backers of metric conversion. They own companies such as Bowers Sausages

and practical difficulties arising from metric regulations. After two years sitting on the problem, the BRTF report simply restated government policy and made no reference to legal inconsistencies or other difficulties. Curiously, the BRTF's brochure "Principles of Good Regulation" features a rubber stamp on its cover (right).

Northern Foods (right) which supports metric conversion.



and Fox's Confectionery which make hidden price increases by downsizing from imperial to metric quantities without price decreases. Lord Haskins was their chairman.

Update: in September 2003, Fox's Confectionery was acquired by Big Bear Ltd. Fox's is no longer owned by Northern Foods. Click here for the new [Fox's Confectionery website](#).



Have you seen this man?

Herr Martin Bangemann

A former lawyer, Herr Bangemann resigned from the European Commission under suspicion of corruption in 1999. He was born in Wanzleben, Germany in 1934. Previously having responsibility for industrial affairs and telecommunication technologies, Herr Bangemann was to have implemented the EC's metric-only labelling policy on January 1st 2000. According to sources, Herr Bangemann went berserk when Washington informed him that the United States was not yet ready to "go metric". Recieves a £60,000 EC pension.



UK Weighing Federation

The UK Weighing Federation complains that traders who refuse to buy metric-only weighing machines are making times hard for weighing machine suppliers. Throughout 2001, there were some 25,000 metric machines lying in warehouses unsold.



Photo: Mail on Sunday

Chris Howell & ITSA

Chris Howell is the weights and measures spokesman for the Institute of Trading Standards Administration. It was he who infamously said imperial traders could martyr themselves if they wanted to, thereby prompting newspapers to adopt the expression "metric martyrs". Mr Howell changed his tune the following week when asked whether he had sympathy with the shops that had not switched. He said, "Well, indeed I do. One of the whole problems here is that government, and I'm not talking about the present government but governments over about 30 years, simply have not prepared the way for this sort of change, and I'm not surprised that customers are still unable to come to terms with the metric system."



The Rt Hon The Lord Howe of Aberavon

Lord Howe was the minister responsible for metric conversion in 1972 and his belief in full metrication is undiminished; he is now a Patron of the UK Metric Association. In fact, under directions from Margaret Thatcher, Geoffrey Howe abolished the Metrication Board in 1980 but now looks back on this decision with deep regret.

No photograph available

Earl Ferriers

The little known and best forgotten junior trade minister who signed the 1994 metric regulations, implementing EC directive 89/617 and compelling the use of metric, in spite of the 1985 Weights and Measures Act that clearly and expressly states people may use pounds and yards as alternatives to kilograms and metres.



Lord Taverne

Lord Taverne is a Patron of the UK Metric Association. He was the minister in charge of decimalisation of the coinage in 1968, and sees metrication as part of the same process.



Erika Mann, German Social Democrat

Erika Mann was the MEP who tabled this notorious motion in 1998: "Remarks that the implementation of the Metric Directive 80/181 results in high costs for European businesses exporting to the US; calls, therefore, for an initiative with a view to encouraging the adoption of the metric system by the US".

James Humble OBE



Photo from BBC TV

Jim Humble OBE is the archetypal metric bureaucrat. His long career began in the 1970s as a director of the Metrication Board.

As a director of the DTI-funded National Consumer Council, he was well placed to ignore consumer views on metric conversion. The NCC's view was, "There is no evidence that Britons cannot cope with these calculations. Every time they cross the Channel, they make the switch".



National
Consumer Council

Mr. Humble was also the chief executive of LACORS, the body responsible for enforcing metric regulations. According to a spokesman, "LACOTS continues to support and co-operate in the effort to complete the metrication process which was initiated decades ago and has become the primary system of measurement for many people".

The logo for LACORS, consisting of the word "LACORS" in a stylized, outlined, blue font.

Jim Humble enjoys his retirement as a patron of the UK Metric Association.



The DTI is responsible for the metric conversion of Britain. To endow its metric policy with a cloak of respectability, the DTI relies on apparently independent consumer groups to say that metric is "in the best interests of consumers". Although purporting to be independent, the NCF receives funding by the DTI and is on hand at the appropriate moment to give "consumer opinions", even though it has never conducted a consumer survey on metric (the only poll it ever conducted was of its OWN MEMBERS). The NCF describes the metric system as a "giant leap for mankind" that offers "benefits undreamt of by most Britons", but is silent on the hidden price increases that occur when producers switch to metric packaging.

The logo for the Metric Sense Campaign, featuring the words "METRIC SENSE" in blue above the word "CAMPAIGN" in blue, with two orange horizontal lines flanking "CAMPAIGN".

The NCF's metrication spokesperson is one Lady Attlee who also runs the Metric Sense Campaign, a pro-metric lobby group. The NCF and Metric Sense Campaign's views on metric are virtually identical, since the same person is responsible for both.



The Irish Minister for Transport Martin Cullen, who changed 35,000 perfectly good miles-per-hour signs at a cost of €11.5 million. He is pictured here unveiling one of the metric road signs which appeared on Irish roads on 20 January 2005.