

cc PRIME MINISTER
MEMBERS E(EA)
SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

PS/SOS MR THORNHILL
PS/PUBS(C&CA) MR GARROD
PS/SEC MR LLOYD
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The Rt Hon James Prior MP
Secretary of State for Employment
Caxton House
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14 November 1979

D. J.

Thank you for your letter of 12 November. As I am sure you will be aware a definite commitment was given by Geoffrey Howe recorded in Hansard when we were last in power that there would be no statutory metrication, and several such commitments were given by me when we were in Opposition.

As far as my responsibilities in this matter are concerned the only outstanding items relating to prescribed quantity goods are weighed-out foods, textiles and hardware and as you will know there is no intention of laying any compulsory Orders with regard to these. However there is no reason why industry should not proceed to go metric. I have always encouraged them to do so where they wish to in an orderly manner based on a clearly laid out programme agreed on a voluntary basis. The CBI and others have been made aware of this for sometime. I see no objection to the Department of Industry or the trade side of my Department encouraging and assisting in this course of action. As far as the retailers are concerned the problem is more difficult. They quite rightly realise that metrication will be unpopular and want to be able to say that Government has made them do it. I must say that I find it rather ironic that trade and industry who have been calling out to be freed of regulations are now calling out to be regulated because it suits them. I am reminded of the Prime Minister's cogent remarks that freedom brings with it responsibility.

I have no intention of hindering either trade or industry from reaching agreement on a voluntary programme of metrication and have stated in a Parliamentary Answer given today that I think this would be desirable. I enclose a copy of that Answer which relates to the winding-up of the Metrication Board.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, members of E(EA) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours truly
Sally*

SALLY OPPENHEIM

CONFIDENTIAL UNTIL 4.00 PM TODAY