

**press notice**

88/750

25 October 1988

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**METRICATION - THERE MAY BE CHANGES, SAYS MAUDE,  
BUT WE WILL FIGHT TO SAVE OUR IMPERIAL TRADITIONS**

Francis Maude, Corporate Affairs Minister, today (25 October) asked for views on metrication following the receipt of European Commission draft proposals on the use of metric units.

The DTI has today sent a consultative document covering the UK proposals to over 500 trade, industry and consumer associations.

"The Commission recently issued draft proposals on the extended use of metric units in the Community. This does not mean that the UK will suddenly lose all its imperial traditions but it does mean that over the next five or six years we would see some changes in the way goods are sold in the shops.

"UK consumers are already well used to buying petrol, DIY supplies and most pre-packed foods in metric units, but there are still some areas, including the loose sale of fresh fruit, vegetables and cooked meats where pounds and ounces will almost certainly be replaced by kilos and grams.

"In matters which are entirely domestic to the UK we see no reason why we cannot continue to use imperial units where they are customary. We therefore want to retain indefinitely the pint for sales of draft beer and cider and for milk in returnable bottles and the mile for the measurement of distance and speed.

"To avoid unnecessary waste, we believe there should also be special arrangements to permit the continued use of imperial returnable bottles (other than milk bottles) up until the end of 1999."

Mr Maude went on to assure all consumers, particularly those over the age of 25 who did not learn the metric system at school, that the transitional period for the introduction of any changes would be as painless as possible.

MORE/.....

"People are already using metric units for shopping far more than they may realise. And every year British consumers in their thousands flock to the hyper-markets of Boulogne and Calais to do their Christmas shopping. Other families choose self-catering holidays in the sun-spots of Europe. All of them are proof positive that shopping 'in metric' is not too difficult. And there will be the help of handy conversion charts and dual price marking in the shops to prevent any unreasonable price increases".

The Minister has asked for comments on all aspects of the draft proposals by 9 December. The European Commission are obliged under the 1979 Units of Measurement Directive to make proposals on the extension of metrication throughout the Community. A Commission working Group will consider this in late Autumn and the Commission is expected to present its final proposals by the end of the year.

NOTE FOR EDITORS

1. Copies of the consultation document can be obtained from the DTI, Consumer Affairs Division, Room 504, 16-18 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0NN.

ENDS



the department for Enterprise

The Hon. Francis Maude MP  
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25 October 1988

Dear Consultee

UNITS OF MEASUREMENT DIRECTIVE: USE OF METRIC UNITS

The European Commission is shortly to propose an extension of the use of metric units.

The attached consultation paper briefly describes the extent to which the retail and manufacturing sectors in the UK have already adopted metric units and invites comments on proposals for further metrication.

Comments should be sent to the Head of Consumer Affairs Branch 1, Department of Trade and Industry, Room 509, 10-18 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0NN to arrive not later than 9 December 1988.

*Yours faithfully,*  
*Francis Maude*

FRANCIS MAUDE

## CONSULTATION PAPER

## UNITS OF MEASUREMENT DIRECTIVE: USE OF METRIC UNITS

1. The European Commission is obliged under the Units of Measurement Directive 1979 to make proposals which will extend the use of metric units throughout the Community for economic, public health, public safety and administrative purposes. The Commission is expected to present its formal proposals by the end of the year.
2. The use of metric units has been legal for most purposes in the UK since 1897. Since 1972, when enabling powers were introduced to remove the few remaining legal barriers to metrication in the industrial sector, manufacturing industry has adopted the metric system to a very considerable extent, particularly where this has been necessary in order to compete in European and most foreign markets; or where manufacturers have found it too costly to produce goods both in the metric and the imperial system. There has also been considerable metrication in the retail sector. There are still several areas where the imperial system predominates, most notably fresh foods and drink weighed or measured for sale in the presence of the customer, but metric units are already in widespread use for the sale of petrol, do-it-yourself supplies and for most pre-packed foodstuffs and non-food household products. In addition, since 1974, the metric system has been taught in schools.
3. The terms of the 1979 Directive mean that further moves to adopt metric units are inevitable. But the Government is concerned to ensure adequate transitional periods to enable businesses to adapt in an orderly manner without incurring unnecessary costs, and to enable consumers to become used to the new measurements. And in matters which are entirely domestic to the UK, we see no reason why we should not continue to use

imperial units where they are customary.

4. We have argued therefore that the Commission's draft proposals should allow the retention of the pint for sales of draught beer and cider and for milk in returnable bottles; the mile for the measurement of distance and speed; and in view of its worldwide use, the troy ounce for bullion dealing.

5. To avoid unnecessary waste and expenditure we have also argued that the 1,200 million imperial returnable bottles (excluding milk bottles) should be allowed to continue in circulation until the end of 1999; and we have sought a similar extended transitional period for the fathom and the therm.

6. Apart from the exceptions in paragraphs 4 and 5, the Commission's proposals are likely to require the use of imperial units to be phased out by the end of 1994, with the metric system in operation thereafter.

7. We welcome comments on these proposals. In particular we should like views on the possible costs to individual sectors of changing from imperial to metric units; and also the savings which could result from the cessation of dual manufacturing and stockholding. We also seek views on whether the transitional periods proposed above are adequate and whether we have correctly identified all the sectors requiring special transitional treatment. When the shape of the eventual Directive becomes clearer, we will seek views on how it should be implemented.

8. Comments should be sent to Head of Consumer Affairs Branch 1, Department of Trade and Industry, Room 509, 10-18 Victoria Street, LONDON, SW1H 0NN by 9 December 1988

Department of Trade and Industry

October 1988

## LEGAL UNITS OF IMPERIAL MEASUREMENTS

for construction and use of measuring instruments, economic, public health, public safety and administrative purposes).

<u>LENGTH</u>	inch	=	2.54cm
	foot	=	30.5cm
	yard	=	0.914m
	mile	=	1.61km
	fathom	=	1.829m

<u>AREA</u>	square inch	=	6.45cm(2)
	square foot	=	929cm(2)
	square yard	=	0.836m(2)
	square mile	=	2.59km(2)
	acre	=	4047m(2)

<u>VOLUME</u>	fluid ounce	=	28.4ml
	gill	=	142ml
	pint	=	568ml
	quart	=	1.14L
	gallon	=	4.55L

<u>MASS</u>	ounce	=	28.35g
	troy ounce	=	31.10g
	pound	=	454g

<u>ENERGY</u>	therm	=	105,506mj
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## KEY TO METRIC EQUIVALENTS

cm - centimetre	L - litre
m - metre	g - gram
km - kilometre	mj - megajoule
ha - hectare	
ml - millilitre	