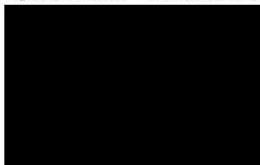




Graham Bostock



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Date 5 October 1995

Dear Mr Bostock

Thank you for your letter of 4 August 1995 to the Prime Minister concerning the use of metric units of measurement. I have been asked to reply and I apologise for the delay in replying.

We in the United Kingdom first decided convert to the metric system of weights and measures in 1965 - in response to lobbying from British business - and before we joined the European Economic Community. That decision was confirmed in the 1972 White Paper on metrication (Cmnd 4800).

The decision that the UK should adopt the metric units as the primary system of measurement was taken in recognition of the fact that the adoption of the international system of metric units was spreading throughout the world. This included other Commonwealth and former Commonwealth countries. It was felt for purposes of trade and science and technology, the United Kingdom would find itself at competitive disadvantage if we continued to adhere to the imperial system in isolation from the international community. It is for similar reasons that the United States of America - the last major trading country to use predominantly imperial units - has recently accelerated its own metrication programme.

Since the early 1970s, therefore, the metric system has been adopted in stages for a wide variety of uses in the United Kingdom - including, since 1974, as the primary system of measurement taught in our schools. Many common groceries have long been sold in metric measures, including instant coffee, tea, bread, breakfast cereals, fruit juice, canned and frozen foods, most pre-packed fruit and vegetables, soap, washing powder, washing-up liquid and other household detergents. Each stage of this process has been achieved without undue confusion



or disruption to either the business world or the general public.

Last November, Parliament approved additional metrication legislation for the United Kingdom. From 1 October 1995 all foods and non-foods sold by quantity and regulated by the Weights and Measures Act 1985 that have not yet converted to metric units will be required to do so. The principal exceptions are:

- goods sold loose from bulk by the pound and the ounce (such as fresh fruit and vegetables) which may continue to be sold in imperial units until 1 January 2000, after which they are required to be sold in metric units.
- sales of draught beer and cider and milk in returnable containers which may continue to be sold by the pint indefinitely.

Retailers may continue to mark their products with imperial units as supplementary indications alongside the primary metric indication. They can also display conversion charts if they consider that this would be helpful to their customers. People will still be able to ask for imperial quantities of goods sold loose from bulk. A retailer will simply weigh out and charge for the metric equivalent, making it clear to the customer that he is selling the metric equivalent.

To assist small traders in the final stage of metrication, my Department has established a working group with representatives of the British Retail Consortium and local authority trading standards departments. The group has produced information and advice, which is being made available to shoppers and traders. I enclose one such leaflet produced for the shopper which you may find helpful.

yours sincerely
Shanta Halai

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