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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

From The Minister of State

20 October 1988

Handwritten initials: EBR/2/HK

Dear Nicholas,

NOx PROTOCOL

WITH COP?

Thank you for sending Geoffrey Howe a copy of your minute of 14 October to the Prime Minister about the unwelcome complication raised by the Swiss draft declaration on NOx emissions. I am replying in Geoffrey's absence in Spain.

I agree that we should do everything possible to focus attention on the considerable achievement of the Protocol itself, and not to let this be overshadowed by the efforts of the Swiss and their friends. My only reservation about your proposed press line, however, is whether we need ourselves be quite so publicly negative about the latter. From our soundings of various overseas posts, we seem to be in reputable company in resisting the proposed Declaration, with the Bulgarian hosts themselves clearly unhappy about it and determined to limit the amount of publicity it gets (something they are of course very practised at doing!). But there is little evidence that others intend to attack, as opposed to simply playing down, the Declaration.

In these circumstances, it seems not only inadvisable but unnecessary for us to appear to lead a campaign against the Declaration, which might risk once again putting us publicly on the wrong side of the environmental argument. I suggest we might do better quietly to ignore it, as for instance the Americans and Norwegians seem disposed to do. Thus, while I am happy with your proposed public line on the Protocol itself, I should prefer what we say - if we are asked - about the Declaration to contain the following elements:-

/a) NOx Protocol

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State for the Environment
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
LONDON SW1

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- a) NOx Protocol a very significant achievement, commanding unanimous support of East and West Europeans, as well as that of others involved, for target reductions based on solid scientific rationale;
- b) Delighted that some countries find themselves in the happy position, due to special geographical or economic factors, to commit themselves to doing more;
- c) We too will make every effort to do better than commitments made under the Protocol: our policy aim of 30% reduction by end of 1990s remains (though difficult to achieve on current forecasts). But we believe emphasis should be on meeting the targets which have been agreed by consensus, and which are based on a proper scientific assessment of what is achievable, not on arbitrary targets that we cannot all be sure of reaching.

If you and other colleagues agree with this slight gloss to your proposed line, you may think it worth our officials getting together to work out a more detailed version of the press briefing reflecting it, for which we could seek appropriate publicity overseas as required.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, as well as to the other recipients of your minute.

*James
Glenarthur*

THE LORD GLENARTHUR

