

CCP



Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Whitehall Place, (West Block), London SW1A 2HH

Tel: 01-270-3000 Direct line: 01-270-859 GTN: 270

Telex: 889351 Fax: 01-270-8125

Dominic Morris Esq
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1

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29 November 1989

Dear Dominic,

STRAW AND STUBBLE BURNING STATEMENT: 30 NOVEMBER 1989

Further to my letter of 24 November, I attach a revised copy of the statement on straw and stubble burning which takes account of comments received. I should be grateful for immediate clearance.

A copy of this letter and enclosure goes to Bernard Ingham (No 10), Steve Catling (Lord President's Office), Roger Bright (Environment), Gillian Kirton (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Colin Walters (Home Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office), Ralph Hume (Lords' Whips), Stephen Leach (Northern Ireland), Jim Gallacher (Scotland), Stephen Williams (Wales) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,
R L Alderton*

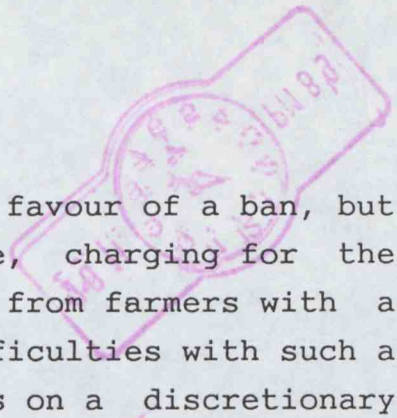
R L Alderton
Parliamentary Clerk



STRAW AND STUBBLE BURNING

ORAL STATEMENT

1. Honourable members will be well aware of the considerable problems this year on straw and stubble burning.
2. Honourable members will also recall a similar situation in 1983 when there were many complaints from the public.
3. In 1984 the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution recommended a ban on straw burning to come into force within five years. By then the Government had already drawn up model byelaws providing for greatly enhanced controls, and the National Farmers' Union issued a toughened Code of Practice in 1986. A ban on burning was therefore not judged to be necessary.
4. But in 1989 the problems have returned - with a vengeance. There have been problems of smoke drifting across roads, in some cases with disastrous results, smoke-filled homes, dirty smuts and genuine fears for the safety of property. In addition there have been considerable losses of hedges and trees and, of course, wildlife. I have received over 600 letters many of which have been from honourable members on both sides of the house and my Department has received notification of over 2,500 complaints.
5. I have therefore carried out a thorough review of the policy and effectiveness of existing controls. I have considered the alternatives carefully so that I can respond first to the public's concern, secondly to farmers' concerns that prohibiting straw burning completely will add to their costs and thirdly to the fact that the reputation of the farming community suffers inevitably from the consequences that this practice has for others living in the countryside.

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6. I note that the NFU has not come out in favour of a ban, but has instead proposed a licensing scheme, charging for the issue of licences and withholding them from farmers with a poor track record. There are legal difficulties with such a scheme in terms of withholding licences on a discretionary basis. But the strongest argument in my view against this proposal is that it would be unlikely to result in any significant reduction in burning.
7. The Government has therefore decided that straw and stubble burning should be banned. If Parliament agrees to the ban it will come into force in the late autumn of 1992. This will give farmers three seasons to adjust to this new situation and to develop alternative methods of cultivation.
8. Accordingly, the Government will be seeking the necessary powers to ban straw and stubble burning during the passage of the Environmental Protection Bill. The powers will also enable me to grant exemptions. I intend consulting the industry on their scope. But any exemptions would be strictly limited, for example to a specific crop like linseed. I do not propose to introduce a system of licences for farmers permitted to burn under these exemptions. I will also be discussing with the NFU how its existing Code of Practice should be strengthened and applied during the period leading up to the proposed ban.

Enw App. Had Raci

