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Still no concession over goods sold loose

Despite the good news that the European Commission is formally proposing an indefinite extension to supplementary indications, it is still refusing to allow British units for use in their own right, even for the sale of loose goods, despite EC Commissioner Günter Verheugen accepting this is a domestic matter to the UK.

We wondered what role the British government had played in the Commission reaching this standpoint; using the Freedom of Information Act, we asked the government for copies of any relevant correspondence between it and the EC. The following reply was received from the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, which now has responsibility for metrication, dated 19 October 2007:

"I am writing to advise you that the time limit for responding to your request for information which the Department received on 19 September needs to be extended. The FOI Act obliges us to respond to requests promptly and in any case no later than 20 working days after receiving your request. However, when a qualified exemption applies to the information and an accompanying public interest test is engaged, the Act allows the time for response to be longer, in which case a full response must be provided within such time as is reasonable in all circumstances. In the case of your request, we have not yet reached a decision on where the balance of the public interest lies. The specific exemption which applies in relation to your request is section 27, international relations. I hope to let you have a response by Monday 12 November"

We conclude from this that the British government has indeed been in contact with the European Commission – and is curiously reluctant to share details. We will report further in the next *Yardstick*.

John Gardner, Director

BWMA is a non-profit body that exists to promote parity in law between British and metric units. It enjoys support from across Britain's political spectrum, from all manner of businesses and the general public. BWMA is financed by member subscriptions and donations.

Membership is £12 per year. Cheques or postal orders payable to "BWMA", 11 Greensleeves Avenue, Broadstone, Dorset BH18 8BJ

Commissioner Günter Verheugen's public statement: "Your pint safe in EU hands", 11 September 2007

Paragraphs have been numbered for the analysis that follows.

¹The time has come to take the sting out of a simmering debate which has caught the public imagination. Is Britain to be or not to be metric?

²Let's get one thing straight from the off. Neither the European Commission nor any faceless "Eurocrat" has or will ever be responsible for banning the great British pint, the mile, and weight measures in pounds and the ounces.

³These imperial measures form part of the traditions that are the very essence of the Britishness that all Europeans know and love.

⁴Did you know that it was actually the British who decided it was time to start the change to metrication as long ago as 1864, when Parliament allowed these units to be used for overseas trade - over a century before the EU even existed?

⁵Britain's Standing Committee of Metrication was set up in 1966 and the UK Metrication Board followed in 1969. There was already a plan to go metric in the sixties when the Beatles were in the Top 10 and people were buying 7-inch vinyl singles for their record players. All of this happened *before* Britain joined the Common Market, as the EU was then known, in 1973.

⁶Far from pushing Britain down the metrication road, "Europe" has always been willing to extend the deadlines, when it discovered practical obstacles and when it realised the UK public felt things were going too far, too fast.

⁷The iPod generation may measure songs in megabytes and a lot of youngsters may have little idea what an ounce or an inch is, but I'm the first to recognise that some British people of my generation in particular are still more comfortable with imperial measures.

⁸Brits like to get milk and beer in pints and truth be told, so do the thousands of Europeans who live in or visit the UK and love those traditions that make it so unique. Brits also like the signposts to say how many miles it is to London, Cardiff, Edinburgh or Belfast.

⁹For similar reasons there's been a long process, stretching for several decades, when many goods could be packaged, or sold in loose form, provided both metric and imperial weights and measures were clearly indicated.

¹⁰Some sections of the British media have regularly jumped on the bogus bandwagon that maintained with varying degrees of hysteria, that the EU was "banning" the pint and that this was part of a wider plot against Britishness,

¹¹Well, we at the EU have decided the time has come to nail these myths once and for all by setting out in black and white what has always been our view: that Britain should continue to use imperial measures for as long as it likes.

¹²After an extensive EU-wide consultation exercise including the Great British public, to assess the impact of Britain's use of imperial measures on the EU Single Market, we're delighted the results have confirmed what we always knew to be the case: there is no problem whatsoever with Brits drinking in pint glasses, operating in miles, or using pounds and ounces alongside their metric equivalent.

¹³There are, of course, sound consumer-related and business reasons for the parallel use of dual metric and imperial weight measures on goods sold in the UK or indeed exported to the United States.

¹⁴Much as it may dismay those who have peddled the metric myth for far too long, we have now proposed legislation enshrining Britain's right to retain pints of milk and beer, miles on road signs and dual indications of weights and measures from now 'till Kingdom come!

¹⁵Someone once said, it would be nice if all rows about the EU could be settled over a pint. Now they can. Cheers!"

Vice-President Günter Verheugen
Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry

BWMA Analysis

Paragraph 2: the statement that the EC will never be "responsible for banning the great British pint" is incorrect; the EC Directive bans the pint for all but two purposes: the milk bottle and draught alcohol. The pint is otherwise illegal. Similarly, the EC has banned weight measures in pounds and ounces.

Paragraph 4: the issue is not whether the metric system is recognized in law, but whether its use is compelled, so Parliament's actions in 1864 are irrelevant.

Paragraph 5: there was no compulsion proposed in 1966, so ditto the above.

Paragraph 6: nothing in this paragraph denies the existence of a deadline; it merely suggests flexibility on the date.

Paragraph 10; the pint *is* banned. Even the exemptions for milk bottles and draught alcohol were temporary until the current proposal.

Paragraph 11; the phrase "has always been our view" is inaccurate. Here are previous quotes from EC representatives:

- Joseph Putzeys, EU Director of Metrology: "We must insist the new deadline [2010] be met. We will insist in the meantime that global industry and

administrations maintain contacts over the next years, and we will see how these relations develop so they don't just forget it" (source: US Metric Association newsletter Mar-Apr 1998).

- Spokesman for EU Industry Commissioner Martin Bangemann: "It is important that we are only talking about a delay [from 2000 to 2010]. The need to show all measurements in metric-only cannot be put off forever" (European Voice July 1998).
- Petros Sourmelis, Head of Trade Section, EU Delegation to the USA: "From 1999, all products on the European Union market must be metric labelled. Even though EU Member States do not use non-metric sizes anymore, the transition period, during which the mention of additional non-metric units on labels is tolerated, will run till the end of 2009" (open letter, Nov 2002).

Paragraph 12; the consultation was not to assess "the impact of Britain's use of imperial measures on the EU Single Market". None of the consultation document's ten topics related to imperial units banned in October 1995 and January 2000. The phrase "using pounds and ounces alongside their metric equivalent" is incorrect: lb/oz cannot be 'used' under the EC Directive, nor is metric the 'equivalent'. The EC proposes only that a non-statutory conversion to pounds and ounces may be expressed alongside the authorized and mandatory metric indication.

Paragraph 13; as noted above, the EC is not proposing 'dual' or 'parallel use'; only metric is recognized for legally prescribed purposes.

Paragraph 14; Whether a right needs to be 'enshrined' is debatable; before Britain signed the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, the rights of British subjects arose from the common law and natural justice, not arbitrary lists drawn up by politicians and officials. For instance, how can the pint for draught alcohol and milk bottles be a right, but not the pint for any other purpose?

Statement by Science and Innovation Minister Ian Pearson - 11 Sept 2007

"I welcome Vice-President Verheugen's comments and the publication of the Commission's proposal today. This shows that the Commission has listened to our views and recognised the strong arguments that we've made for maintaining dual metric and imperial labelling and the right for the UK to decide on the future use of pints and miles. We know how important this is to the British people and are grateful for the Commission's support for this use to continue. It clearly demonstrates the value of working together with the Commission to achieve our aims."

BWMA response to EC Commission Services report regarding Directive EC/80/181, 25 July 2007

Dear Mr Verheugen

Our Association welcomes the recent report by Commission Services which proposes to extend indefinitely the use of supplementary indications. We also welcome the proposal to delete the obligation on the UK to fix an end date for the exemption in relation to Article 1b (i.e. the pub pint and mile).

We would like to return to the matter of imperial units as authorised for selling loose goods and draw attention to the following statement on page 11 of the report, which relates to the scope of the Directive:

"... as it [unit pricing] does not concern cross border trade, there is no incentive for the Commission to pursue the UK authorities on this issue. The Commission considers this to be primarily a matter for the Member State authorities to deal with".

This view of the Directive's cross border scope is consistent with the text of the Directive, which indicates it is concerned with facilitating trade between Member States:

"... units of measurement in the Member States differ from one Member State to another and as a result hinder trade ... it is necessary to harmonize laws, regulations and administrative provisions in order to overcome such obstacles".

Therefore, the Commission will be aware that the application of the Directive preventing the use of imperial units for selling loose goods within the UK is *outside* its stated scope.

In considering this matter, the report notes that there are different perspectives within the UK; NGOs and retailers support the pre-2000 position, and the government opposes it (page 12, paragraph 4).

Our point is that, while this application of the Directive stands, the UK cannot resolve the matter for itself.

We are not asking the Commission to legalise the use of imperial units for loose goods, but that the Commission withdraws from this issue, so that the matter can be resolved within the UK.

We therefore urge the Commission to exempt the sale of loose goods from the Directive.

Yours sincerely, etc

EC Commissioner Günter Verheugen's reply to BWMA, 29 August 2007

Dear Mr Gardner

Thank you for your letter of 25 July concerning the sale of goods sold loose and in bulk.

As you mention, the report on the public consultation notes that the presentation of prices in local markets does not have cross border implications and that therefore the Commission will not pursue the UK government on its current implementation. The Commission considers this to be primarily a matter for the Member State authorities to deal with.

From the side of private persons there were many differing views on the current application of the directive, notably in the United Kingdom. Many were concerned by the non-use of metric units, notably in offers and as the base for unit pricing. The result can lead to unclarity and to potential confusion. Consumers complained that they cannot always compare the price of products in shops easily and that this may be to the advantage of traders and at the expense of shoppers. A number of photos were sent by individuals underlining the lack of market surveillance.

In its reaction to the public consultation, the UK authorities also did not request a change to the current directive concerning the sale of goods sold loose and in bulk and this is also mentioned in the report.

It would seem therefore that there currently exists no general problem in the enforcement of the Directive concerning the sale of goods sold loose and in bulk in the UK which would need to be addressed by a change to Directive 80/181/EEC.

You may however wish to consider discussing in more detail the manner in which the directive is implemented in the UK with the UK's authorities.

Yours sincerely, etc

BWMA reply to Günter Verheugen, 23 October 2007

Dear Mr Verheugen

Thank you for your letter of 29 August 2007.

The Commission stresses that it recognises the importance of imperial units to Britain. This was made clear by its comments on 10 September 2007. The Commission wishes the British population to believe that imperial units, including pounds and ounces, can still be used.

However, the Commission's published proposal does not reflect these sentiments and, more than this, leads it into a contradictory position since, aside from the three stated derogations, imperial units are not recognised under Directive EC/80/181 for use in their own right.

We would understand the Commission's position if the matter that we raise - the sale of loose goods, in particular the pre-2000 exemption relating to pounds and ounces - were a cross-border matter. However, as you have noted and commented upon, the sale of loose goods is internal to the UK, meaning arguments at the European level for and against their use are neither necessary nor relevant.

This issue is therefore one of subsidiarity, not whether British units should be permitted. Consequently, there is no conflict of interest between the Commission and any UK group that supports metrication, for such groups will be free under subsidiarity to lobby for it, and the UK government can legislate either way.

If, however, loose goods sales are not exempt from the Directive, no decision can be made at the UK level, meaning this issue can only re-emerge as a political issue; and be all the more damaging since the EC has made assurances that it has withdrawn from the matter.

We therefore urge the Commission to realise that withdrawing the Directive's scope from loose goods will de-politicise the matter while enabling both supporters and opponents of metric conversion to make their case in Britain.

Yours sincerely, etc

[Mr Verheugen's reply will be in the next Yardstick].

The Independent newspaper made the following comment: “Brussels wants to help Gordon Brown stave off domestic demands for a referendum on the European constitutional treaty. Giving ground on weights and measures no doubt seems a relatively simple way bolstering the Prime Minister's domestic position” (12 September 2007).

Response by Ron Gainsford, chief executive of Trading Standards Institute, 13 Sept 2007

“The legal position has not changed - pre-packed goods and goods sold loose from bulk, such as fruit and vegetables, are still required to be sold in metric quantities and weighing scales must be calibrated in metric units of measurement. Suggestions that goods can now be sold in pounds and ounces are incorrect. The only change - which has come about as a result of the EU ruling - is that goods can continue to be labelled with both metric and imperial quantities and with dual price per weight indications, indefinitely. Prior to this recent ruling, dual marking was due to end in 2009”.

Reaction by LACORS, 12 Sept 2007

“Many colleagues will have noted recent news reports regarding metrication such as the one on the BBC website *EU gives up on 'metric Britain'*. They concern the EU making a 'U-turn' on metrication, the UK 'reverting to imperial measures' and claims of victory for campaign groups such as Metric Martyrs. Such reports are, of course, false. The reality is that EU Commissioner Gunter Verheugen has made it official that the UK will be allowed to continue to use imperial measures indefinitely - only in as much as they can at present. In other words, we must still use metric measurements when used for trade, but imperial measures will continue to be permissible as supplementary indications. The pint of milk/beer, imperial measurements for road signs etc will still be used. In essence, nothing has changed.

“Reports like these are unhelpful both to the general public and industry, particularly small traders who could interpret them to mean they can revert to selling solely in imperial units. This could then lead to enforcement action which is in no-one's best interests. In an attempt to set the record straight, LACORS will be contacting journalists to explain the situation. It would be useful if examples could be sent, on an ongoing basis, of any current or future metrication enforcement action (not necessarily prosecution). If the trader claims to have believed reports of the 'U-turn' published in the media this would be particularly useful. There is no need to provide their name, just the location and brief details of action taken. Further information on metrication can be downloaded from the LACORS website, and the BBC has a really useful (and impartial) Q&A for members of the public (including traders) wanting to know more”.

BWMA Comment: while LACORS and TSI's comments on the Directive are correct, EC Directives have to be transposed into British law before they can take legal effect. It remains the fact that the most recent British Act of Parliament on the matter – Weights and Measures Act 1985 – authorises the uses of imperial units. On this, LACORS and TSI remain silent.

Colin Hunt's weighing machines seized

Many members will have read in Christopher Booker's report in the *Sunday Telegraph* that Colin Hunt, one of the traders prosecuted for using pounds and ounces in 2002, had his scales confiscated on 13 September 2007 for continuing to trade in imperial units. This incident illustrates the irrelevance of the EC's proposal to the domestic UK trade.

Americans welcome lifting of 2010 deadline - U.S. National Electrical Manufacturers Association, 14 Sep 2007

“NEMA welcomes the European Commission's September 10 proposal to indefinitely postpone implementation of the European Union's 1980 metric-only labeling directive, which would have banned usage of non-metric units on products sold in the EU.

“We very much appreciate this new proposal”, noted NEMA President and Chief Executive Officer Evan Gaddis. “It recognizes that the original directive, which was principally drafted to further British and Irish integration into the EU, would have also had serious negative implications for trans-Atlantic trade”.

“The U.S. electrical equipment industry is hardly opposed to the metric system itself”, added Gaddis, “but fundamental differences between the built electrical infrastructures in Europe and North America make required (as opposed to optional) usage of metric-only labeling unworkable”.

Communicating frequently with government officials and industry counterparts on both sides of the Atlantic, NEMA has been a leader in efforts to address concerns posed by the directive— which has never come into force and is currently subject to a third 10-year suspension. The proposed indefinite suspension, which was authored by the Commission's Enterprise Directorate, must still be ratified by the European Parliament and Council of Ministers”.

Implications for U.S. Metric Lobby

The strategy of the US Metric Association and the US government's National Institute of Standards & Technology has been to use the EC 2010 ban to pressure U.S. legislators into scrapping that part of the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act which requires inch-pound labeling.

Currently, the FPLA, applying to packaged foods and consumable goods, accords metric and inch-pound equal status, meaning goods are dual marked. USMA and NIST wish to repeal the inch-pound obligation, leaving metric as the sole mandatory system and bringing to the

U.S. the same regulatory regime that currently exists in the EU.

Since 2002, NIST has stated that, "A European Union Directive requires that after January 1 2010, all packages sold in the EU be labeled only with metric units ... The amendments [to FPLA] should be adopted so they become effective well before the January 1 2010, deadline for metric labeling in the EU".

The EC's retreat on supplementary indications means that any U.S. moves towards metric conversion must now be made internally. Since the U.S. population has no wish to go metric, increasing reliance on 'metricity' can be expected. The main piece of misleading terminology used by NIST/USMA is "voluntary metric-only labeling" which, decoded, means compulsion metric conversion.

EC gives reasons for making derogation indefinite

The EC's previous response to the EU-US labelling conflict created by the 2010 ban on non-metric information was to postpone the deadline; thus, the ban was delayed from 1990 to 2000, and then to 2010. One of the concerns was that the EC would extend the deadline for a fourth ten-year period, meaning BWMA would be back fighting this issue in 2016 or 2017. Fortunately, the EC rejected the idea of another time-limited extension in favour of an indefinite suspension; it gives the following four reasons:

(i) "Restricting the use of non-SI units could create extra risks which could go against essential requirements stipulating that the benefits to a patient must outweigh the risks in the IVD Directive 98/79/EC".

(ii) "Labelling in both Joule (SI) and 'Kcal' (non-SI) is prescribed by the nutritional labelling Directive 90/496/EEC and prohibiting it would require a change to that directive. A research study indicated that consumers 'preferred calories to joules as a measure of energy'".

(iii) "From an intellectual property rights perspective, allowing the use of supplementary indications takes a similar approach to Rule 10 of the Regulations under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), which lays out the rules for physical units. The PCT requires metric units to be used but allows other units if accompanied by metric units. As it does not permit national authorities to impose more stringent formal requirements than those under the PCT, indefinitely allowing supplementary indications would avoid a clear inconsistency between the PCT and European legislation".

(iv) "The sanction of a deadline at a certain date, enticing as it may seem, would, however, backfire if really carried out. A metric-only EU prohibiting supplementary indications would force US exporters to relabel all products they export to the EU. This would be a strange way of thanking the US for adapting their state and federal laws to conform to international standards. By requiring metric-only labeling the EU would be imposing a new barrier on trade to products from the US".

Guyana: further to *Yardstick 28*, the following is an update by Evadne Benfield of Guyana's National Bureau of Standards on her organisation's metrication efforts, as reported by *Stabroek News*, 27 May 2007:

"A subject which has generated much public interest and debate is the metric issue. Many persons particularly vendors in the retail sector are doubtful that Guyana will fully become metric, but more and more because of emerging trade agreements and world trade, the use of a commonly used system for measurement has become necessary.

"Guyana recognized this fact and began switching over to the metric system in the late seventies/early eighties but encountered setbacks at that time, particularly with the older generation, who were doubtful that Guyana could switch over to the metric system. This was mainly due to reservations and resistance and the perception of a large segment of the population that the principles of the metric system are difficult to understand.

"This view is even portrayed today especially in our municipal markets, where consumers and vendors take a half-hearted approach and attempt to use both systems using metric devices. But this state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue and Guyana cannot afford to remain in isolation as it needs to move more swiftly towards fully implementing the metric system, considering that all of our neighbours are completely metric [as are] most of the other countries around the world, with the exception of a few which continue to use the imperial system. We also need to take cognizance of the fact that the Caricom and single market is about to come on stream, and with it the need to have one common system of measurement for the region.

"In the field of trade and commerce, nearly all world trade is conducted in the metric system, and the switch-over is inevitable because the world is rapidly becoming a closely knit society and global village. In addition, industries and the economy will benefit tremendously from improved trading abilities and opportunities in world markets, and in fact this is the opportune time to retool machinery, etc, to facilitate the change-over...

"The metric system has many virtues, the most obvious of which is its decimal nature. To convert from a smaller unit of measure to a larger, or vice versa, it is necessary only to divide or multiply by 10,000, 1000 and so on. Also the system is international with metric measures having precisely the same significance in every country. The metric system is therefore the simplest and most universally used measurement in the world. For that reason it is vital for all stakeholders to expeditiously drive the metrication process forward as significant strides have already been made in Guyana.

"The legislative breakthrough came on January 1, 2002, when Order Number 4 of 2001 under the Weights and Measures Act came into effect, making the metric system the official and legal system of measurement in Guyana. However, this is just the beginning as much more work needs to be done (especially the education process) to have all legislation in our country fully changed over to the

metric system. The Guyana National Bureau of Standards, which in June of the year 1997 took up the challenge and re-launched the national metrication campaign, has been working together with the National Metrication Committee to spearhead the national metrication campaign and has established mechanisms and organizational networks to complete the process. Work is in progress and intensive training and sensitization sessions with market vendors and retailers are ongoing. There are also live television workshops. However, while the campaign has experienced encouraging success, everyone is not totally committed.

“So, Guyana and Guyanese young and old, ministers, clergymen, farmers, merchants, schoolchildren, taxi drivers, this is a golden opportunity to adopt and embrace a modern, simple, more widely used and logical system of measurement that will make for greater efficiency. It's time to throw out the obsolete and cumbersome imperial system. After all is said and done, we are living in a metric world”.

Waitrose supermarket

Our colleague Stuart Eager received the following from Waitrose, dated 25 April 2007: “We are most conscious that particular groups are confused by the metric system and active thought was given to providing the dual weight description on our labelling. However, we ultimately decided against this because metrication would be the norm from that point on, and we judged that to continue with a provision of imperial equivalent description is more likely to confuse an increasing number of customers in the future. We certainly appreciate that many customers did not find the change to metric quantities easy, but one should also bear in mind that there is a completely new generation who, having been brought, up on the metric system in schools, have a similar difficulty in coping with Imperial measures. Metric measures are now firmly established in many walks of life and, after careful consideration, Waitrose has judged that the permanent combination of metric and Imperial units seems to offer the worst of all worlds”.

Warwick Cairns “About the Size of It”

Warwick Cairns has published *About the Size of It; the Common Sense Approach to Measuring Things*. In part a case for the continued use of traditional British measures, this book celebrates the richness and commonality of systems from around the world, and how they were formed by the one guiding principle of measurement no one ever mentions: that most of us have better things to think about. Readers will find out why an old Wellington boot is as important an instrument of spacial awareness as was ever invented; why the size of a space shuttle's fuel tanks has more to do with the proportions of a horse's rump than rocket science; and why how tired your ox gets, how much water it takes to drown you, and how much you can hold in one hand while doing something else are all essential principles that explain how man has balanced and judged his world since the dawn of time.

Available from bookshops, cover price is £12.99, or from Amazon.co.uk for £7.79

Alexander McCall Smith: ‘A full and convincing account of why our well-trying and trusted traditional measures make human sense’; *Conn Iggulden*: ‘Fun and fascinating – the secrets and tricks of how we measure the world around us’

From the Archives: *Decimalisation of the Circle*, from the BWMA annual report of July 1908:

The proposals of the Geneva International Geographical Congress to (1) fix universal longitudes, and (2) employ the decimal system for the measurement of angles, are quite on a par with previous doings of pro-meterists. It is the old story of theorists laying down the law for practical people. Speaking of this proposal to decimalise the circle, for that is what it all amounts to, Lord Kelvin said it is “an unwise and unfortunate proposal”. Admiral Field sums up his opinion in one word – “disastrous”. Lloyds' refer to the two proposals as “two chimerical ideas”, and their Lords of the Admiralty say, “it is unlikely that a matter of such far-reaching consequences will be settled by the Geographical Congress”.

It is, of course, a matter of opinion as to what extent these metric agitators should be taken seriously but, if past history is any guide, this Congress will ‘resolve’ that the circle be decimalised, then some Government ‘scientifically advised’ will pass a law on the subject, after which the pro-metric agitators the world over will tell us that the metric system is at last *adopted* for navigation purposes. We know such a procedure seems too silly to be credible, but it is only what has been done and what is being done today. Navigators would laugh at the futility of such a law and ignore it, as many industries on the Continent now scoff and ignore the law affecting weights and measures, but what does that matter to the metric agitators? “The Government has made it the law of the land, and *therefore* the people have adopted it” is their reply.

There is present-day evidence that this method of passing resolutions after academical discussions by irresponsible people is still going on. A meeting of scientists has been held – an ‘International’ meeting, of course – to consider the question of bringing the carat under metric domination. A resolution was passed by that meeting urging the Governments of the several countries represented at the Conference to adopt a metric carat, but there does not appear to have been a word said as to the reception it would receive at the hands of the trade. No, traders must be compelled to adopt what the ‘scientific adviser’ thinks best. So far as we can learn, the opinions of the trade have never been sought on this alteration of a standard which it has used for ages, and yet a notice – doubtless inspired – is already going the round of the English and Continental Press stating that the French Government have *adopted* the metric carat.

COMPULSORY METRICATION -- A RETROSPECT

By Vivian Linacre

It is clear, looking back over the thirteen years of our campaign, that we have always known that our cause is right -- not merely because of its merits but, even more significantly, because the authorities have throughout lied to us and to the country. Their whole case for compulsory metrication is based on a lie -- or, rather, a colossal confidence trick -- which they have tried to sustain and embellish with specifically calculated lies.

The prime deception is that compulsory metrication was necessary in order to harmonise weights and measures within the EEC (now the EU), which in fact had nothing to do with it. In any economic bloc, a single currency is obviously the chief priority, far above such a secondary factor as a single system of weight and measure, yet the UK still enjoys an opt-out from the euro -- thanks to which the City of London remains the world's no.1 financial centre. By attaching a greater value to the pound *avoir du pois* than to the pound sterling, the EU pays imperial measures the highest possible compliment!

No, the sole object was always to destroy the system of weights and measures that we share with the USA, thereby breaking a vital cultural and commercial bond between the two premier English-speaking nations. The strategy was to impose metrication on Britain in order to isolate the USA as the only major surviving non-metric nation, thereby ensuring its ultimate conversion. It is depressing to realize that metrication of Britain was no more than a means of achieving metric domination of the global superpower.

So the EU and our own Department of Trade & Industry told reciprocal lies, telling us that "the USA is accelerating its own metrication program" while telling Washington that as from 1973 (following the European Communities Act), Britain had already gone metric. We can rejoice at the relief afforded recently by the EU Commissioner for Industry, Günter Verheugen, proposing permanent permission for use of "supplementary indications", but the truth is simply that he has concluded, after a decade of futile propaganda, that the USA will never adopt a primary metric system and therefore continuing coercion by the EU would only damage trade relations with the both the USA and the UK.

Yet, although we have gained only a slight concession, the most important consequence is the good news -- that we are no longer on the defensive! We can at last go onto the attack for the real battle: the restoration of British weights and measures as legal units. But first we must once and for all nail two other historic lies by our thwarted enemies.

1 "The country cannot authorize more than one system of weights and measures". But our Act of Parliament in 1897 made optional use of metric units in Britain legal for all trade purposes, as did a US Act of Congress in 1866. Prior to EEC metrication, the two systems co-existed here in perfect harmony, while 'dual marking' is the norm in the USA, where the alternative units enjoy parity.

2 "Metrication was not imposed by the EU, for Britain had already decided to go metric in 1965". But that date refers to no more than a Ministerial statement, which was made in support of Harold Wilson's application to join the 'Common Market', that Charles de Gaulle promptly rejected. Likewise, Edward Heath's metrication programme was introduced solely as part of the price for admission. So we must forever remind friend and enemy alike that compulsory metrication was entirely unnecessary and has served no useful purpose -- and it arose wholly and exclusively from the EEC.

DTI RIP

The Department of Trade and Industry is no more. It is replaced by the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR). BERR brings together functions from the former DTI and the Better Regulation Executive (formerly the Regulatory Impact Unit, and before that the De-regulation Unit), previously part of the Cabinet Office. BERR has wasted no time in issuing guidance on correct thinking. Its website contains the following question and answer: "*Who can I contact to complain about a shop/trader who only uses imperial measurements? It is illegal to weigh or advertise a product by only using imperial measurement. If you do want to report a shop/trader for doing this, you need to contact your local Trading Standards Department (address below) who are responsible for enforcing the Weights and Measures Act*".

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