

The Yardstick

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BWMA gratefully records the Patronage of the late The Hon. Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP and Lord Shore, and the Honorary Membership of the late John Aspinall, Nirad C Chaudhuri CBE, Jennifer Paterson, CBE, Leo McKern AO, Norris McWhirter CBE, Fred Dibnah MBE, Sir Julian Hodge, KStG, KStJ, Bernard Levin, CBE, Dr Charles H Sisson, CH, DLitt, Fritz Spiegl, F S Trueman, OBE, Sir Rowland Whitehead, Bt, George MacDonal Fraser, OBE, Beryl Cook, OBE, John Michell, David Shepherd, MBE, Keith Waterhouse, CBE, Dick Francis, CBE, Prof. Anthony Flew

No change

David Willetts, the new Minister for Universities and Science, at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, has reneged on the Conservative Party's pledge to allow the use of imperial units for trade purposes. That Mr Willetts made this decision without meeting BWMA suggests that he had no intention of even considering the matter.

This is the same Mr Willetts who, as shadow minister, said in December 2008 that, "... pounds and ounces are part of our country's rich traditions", and should be "protected". On the third page of this *Yardstick*, we show how both Conservatives and Labour have routinely changed their policy since the 1970s, when going from Opposition to Government, and back again.

A success

We are delighted to report that the Minister for Transport Philip Hammond has quashed the previous government's plan to make metric mandatory on height and width restriction road signs. He has also ordered that Department for Transport use miles in documents, reports and communications, not kilometres.

Freedom Bill

We want all members to take Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg up on his July invitation to say what laws should be scrapped. Members might ask: is it worth it? Yes, because, as this *Yardstick* illustrates, the new government contains many supporters of BWMA's cause, both Conservative and Liberal Democrat, and we must exploit every avenue.

A two-sentence letter is sufficient: refer to Mr Clegg's invitation, and say that UK laws (not EU laws) banning or criminalising imperial units should be repealed. Write to: The Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP, Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet Office, 70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS (please send a copy of Mr Clegg's reply to BWMA, c/o L. Consterdine, 11 Greensleeves Avenue, Broadstone, Dorset BH18 8BJ).

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

BWMA letter to David Willetts MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 6 June 2010

Dear Mr Willetts

Our Association opposes regulations that ban the use of imperial weights and measures for trade purposes.

The previous government's view was that the UK is bound by European Directives in this matter. We dispute this; EC Directive 80/181 states in its text that it relates to cross-border, not domestic, trade. The new government is therefore free to decide.

The policy of the Conservative Party since 1998 has been to oppose compulsory use of metric units. Supportive Early Day Motions have also been signed by Lib-Dems, including Vince Cable and Edward Davey.

We would therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you or your representatives, with a view to repealing regulations that criminalise users of imperial units. Such a discussion would be likely to include the following topics:

- EC Directive 80/181
- Enforcement issues
- The 2002 Divisional Court ruling
- Consumer protection
- Freedom of choice

We believe a cessation of the needless drive towards a metric-only society since the mid-1960s is long overdue.

Yours sincerely,
John Gardner

Reply from David Willetts, 6 July 2010

Dear Mr Gardner

Thank you for your letter of 6 June about units of measurement in use for trade and your suggestion that units of measurement legislation be repealed.

The Government recognises that the enforced switch to metric units of the 1990s has been unpopular with many consumers and traders who prefer imperial units. We are committed to fair trade and want a system of measurement that is fair to everyone in the UK. We also recognise that for much of UK business and science the use of metric units is essential to ensure that they can continue to compete with the best in the world.

The UK is already substantially metric and so turning back the clock to a single system of imperial units is no longer an option. To do so would create a major disadvantage for UK plc in its dealings with the rest of the world, put us in breach of our European obligations, and impose additional costs on business and the public sector.

There are no further deadlines to end the remaining uses of imperial units. Imperial units remain as primary indications for a limited number of uses. They are still preferred by some consumers and they are used by many traders and manufacturers alongside metric units in dual labelling. We

are committed to retaining the right to use imperial units in dual labelling and have no plans to introduce any further metrication.

However, it remains important for fair trade that there is a single set of units in use for trade. Returning to the use of imperial units even for a narrow range of goods would, at this stage, unfairly disadvantage the vast majority of businesses who have already switched over to metric units. It would also reduce consumer protection as buyers would no longer be able to compare prices, undermining consumer confidence in the marketplace and leading to a potential market failure.

In any case, the scope of Directive 80/181/EC (as amended) is very wide and is not restricted to cross border trade. Hence the importance of the continued derogations for imperial units for milk, draught beer and cider and road traffic, even though these usages do not have any impact on cross border trade. As you know, that Directive was amended just last year and is unlikely to be subject to review before 2019.

You have suggested a meeting and I can confirm that my officials would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues further and that they will be in touch to arrange a meeting in due course.

Yours sincerely, David Willetts

Further letter from BWMA to David Willetts, 16 July 2010

Dear Mr Willetts

Thank you for your letter of 6 July 2010. That you have adopted the standpoint of your fifth paragraph without meeting us suggests that you were closed to the idea of changing the previous government's policy before we wrote.

The Conservative Party's decision to oppose criminalisation of imperial units was taken at Shadow Cabinet level in 1998, and reaffirmed since then. Please explain the process by which that decision was overturned.

We have two other questions arising from your letter. You state, "... the scope of Directive 80/181/EC (as amended) is very wide and is not restricted to cross border trade". The Directive states:

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

Could you please explain your interpretation of the above extract, with particular reference to the words, "in these circumstances".

With regards to your assertion that allowing imperial units will cause "potential market failure", please provide the evidence that led you to this view.

Yours sincerely, John Gardner

To be continued...

See how they run

Conservatives in Opposition, 6 April 1978: “We are voting against the Government’s order on weighed out foods which would be metric if the order were passed by 1981. The Conservative Party is opposed to statutory metrication across the board”.

Conservatives in Government, 16 November 1988: “Under the EC’s 1979 Units of Measurement Directive ... the Government is considering ... proposals to phase out by the end of 1994 the use of the remaining imperial units for most trade purposes. However, as Mr Bostock mentions in his letter, 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. We are therefore seeking to retain the pint for sales of draught beer and cider and for milk in returnable containers and the mile for distance and speed measurement”.

Labour in Opposition, 20 February 1997 (letter by Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs): “I oppose any measure which would make it an offence for a greengrocer to sell apples in pounds and ounces”.

Labour in Government, 20 July 1999: “The DTI has been reviewing metrication, including the changeover for loose goods. I hope to report to Parliament shortly”; *14 October 1999*: “The report confirms that metric units are now used for labelling and pricing goods ... under legislation in 1994, goods sold by weight, mainly fresh foods, are due to be priced and weighed in grams and kilograms after 31 December 1999. Goods sold loose by weight now account for about only 10 per cent of sales in the typical supermarket. Imperial weights have therefore become an anomaly ... The Government reappraisal of metrication policy therefore concluded that there would be no benefit to either the consumer or the retailer in postponing the deadline”.

Conservatives in Opposition, 23 March 1998: “... it has now been agreed in Shadow Cabinet that we should oppose compulsory metrication and making it illegal to use imperial measures. We do not think it should be a criminal offence to use imperial measures”; *22 June 2000 (press release)*: “Conservatives will be seeking ways to change the law so that loose goods can still be sold in imperial measurements”; *5 January 2004 (letter by Shadow Secretary of State for Industry)*: “Whether traders choose to sell in imperial or metric units should be a matter between them and their consumers”; *1 July 2004*: “This is certainly not another case of Conservatives saying one thing and doing another. We have pledged to reinstate the right to sell goods in pounds and ounces and will do so”; *17 December 2008 (statement by David Willetts, Shadow Innovation, Universities and Skills Secretary, in response to EC commissioner Gunther Ver-*

heugen’s assurance that the EC will not be “responsible for banning the great British pint, the mile and weight measures in pounds and ounces”): “The pint, the mile and pounds and ounces are part of our country’s rich traditions and it is great that they have been protected from an absurd attempt by the EU to get rid of them”.

Conservatives/LibDems in Government, 6 July 2010 (letter by David Willetts): “Returning to the use of imperial units even for a narrow range of goods would, at this stage, unfairly disadvantage the vast majority of businesses who have already switched over to metric units. It would also reduce consumer protection as buyers would no longer be able to compare prices, undermining consumer confidence in the marketplace and leading to a potential market failure”.

BWMA letter to Philip Hammond MP, Secretary of State for Transport, Department for Transport, 4 July 2010

Dear Mr Hammond

Our Association campaigns for the retention of imperial weights and measures, and would like to express support for the Department for Transport’s recent switch from kilometres to miles for departmental reports. It has long been an anomaly that the government uses a unit of distance different from that used on road signs and preferred by the vast majority of the population.

We would like to raise another metric issue. In late 2009, the Labour government announced proposals¹ to compel the use of metric on height and width restriction road signs, alongside existing feet and inches (currently, metric is optional). The anticipated benefit is said to be a reduction in ‘bridge strikes’, where the roof of a lorry impacts the underside of the bridge.

We asked the then-government for its research on the relationship between existing dual imperial-metric signs and bridges struck by lorries. The government replied:

“The Department does not hold information on the signing in place at locations where bridge strikes have occurred, nor has such research been carried out” (email, 10 November 2009).

This means that the last government possessed no evidence to show that adding metric to imperial signs produced the benefit claimed. Indeed, it may be the case that dual signs *increase* the risk of bridge strikes by, for instance, causing driver uncertainty and confusion. We raised the absence of research with the Consultation Coordinator on 1 December 2009, and again on 16 February 2010, but had no response to either letter.

We ask that the proposal be quashed. Existing signs in feet and inches are quite sufficient to convey height and

¹ Traffic Signs (Amendment) Regulations and General Directions 2010

width restrictions to drivers, who have their vehicle heights displayed inside their cabs. We see no benefits of using two systems of measurement where one will do.

Quashing the proposal will also represent a saving of £527,000, this being the estimated cost of converting imperial-only signs.

Yours sincerely, John Gardner

On 22 July, we received a telephone call from Paul Stephenson, Special Adviser to Philip Hammond, saying that the Department of Transport would be scrapping the proposal.

On the following pages:

- **Statements by MPs, now Government ministers, made in 1997/98 when asked to sign Gwyneth Dunwoody's Early Day Motion, tabled with assistance from BWMA**
- **Early Day Motions between 1998 and 2007 against compulsory metric conversion and the MPs who signed them.**
- **An April 2000 speech by David Lidington MP, now the Minister for Europe, when proposing a private members bill in Parliament**

Vincent Cable MP, Liberal Democrat, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade

16 January 1998: I have not yet seen the EDM proposed by Gwyneth Dunwoody, but I was appalled to hear that there would be severe fines on anybody failing to use metric measure. I suspect that I would be one of the early victims of the legislation, since I still think in terms of gallons, miles and other non-metric equivalents. Metrication obviously has its value in simplifying weights, measures and distances in terms of international standardisation, but it would clearly be outrageous if we were to be penalised for using traditional measures. When the EDM appears before the Commons, I will certainly very happily sign it.

John Hayes MP, Conservative, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning

16 December 1997: Thank you for your letter of the 12th December in support of Gwyneth Dunwoody's EDM in respect of Britain's weights and measures. Please be assured of my full support for this campaign, I have written to Ms Dunwoody offering my assistance.

Philip Hammond MP, Conservative, Secretary of State for Transport

7 November 1997: Thank you very much for your letter and for sending me a copy of the Newsletter of the British Weights and Measures Association which I have indeed now read with considerable interest. I have much sympathy with the views expressed.

Norman Baker MP, Liberal Democrat, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport

22 January 1998: Thank you very much for your recent letter concerning the Early Day Motion tabled by Gwyneth Dunwoody MP, concerning the imperial weights and measures system. I will surprise you by telling you that I agree with this motion and I am happy to sign it. In fact, some time ago, long before the election, I wrote a column for the Sussex Express indicating why I felt it was unnecessary for British measures to be changed. Unfortunately I am unable to put my hands on it at the moment, otherwise I would send you a copy. I do believe our future lies in Europe, for all sort of reasons I am happy to explain if you wish, but mainly because, like it or not, there is really no viable alternative. However, I agree with you that the principle of subsidiarity should be used to enable as many as decisions as possible to be taken at the national, and indeed local level, and to protect what is best and individual about each country. In my view, Europe will not have a long term future supported by the populations at large if individual national identities are eradicated.

The following two MPs, now ministers, did not sign the EDM

Eric Pickles MP, Conservative, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

20 January 1998: I want to broadly keep the possibility of using imperial measures, but Mrs Dunwoody's Motion does not stand much of a chance in practical terms. I regret that I will not be signing the Motion. Measures for manufacturing and retailing have used the metric system for many years now. Indeed there are many school children who would be genuinely puzzled when faced with imperial measures. We have been using metric for many years, if you have a look among your shelves you will see that everything from cans of soup to jars of Marmite are in metric sizes. In industry everything from windows to motorcars have been measured in metric for many years. Even American cars are manufactured to a metric system. I support the idea that people should be able to buy, in a loose form, 5 pounds of potatoes or 10 ounces of fish, but the decision to go metric was made while I was still at school and I was personally taught in the metric system. In short I believe that this particular horse bolted many years before this attempt to belatedly shut the stable door.

Caroline Spelman MP, Conservative, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

17 December 1997: Thank you for your letter. I grew up in a generation who, in the course of our schooling, went metric and I operate in both sets of measures. However, I notice that my children are being educated exclusively with metric measurement so basically it is a question of time until the metric measurement establishes itself as the "norm". In the interim I believe the two sets of measurements should be allowed to operate because the imperial measurements are part of the English vernacular.

Early Day Motions, 1998 to 2007

EDM627 - UK Weights and Measures, proposed by Gwyneth Dunwoody, 12 January 1998

That this House welcomes and supports the use of customary United Kingdom measures; opposes the use of criminal penalties in enforcing metrication; is aware of the strength of opposition to compulsory metrication by business and the British public; believes that the use of UK measures is fully compatible with the European Union's stated principle of subsidiarity; and calls for compulsory metrication to be repealed.

Gwyneth Dunwoody, Labour
Alan Beith, Liberal Democrat
Alan Campbell, Labour
Andrew Dismore, Labour
Andrew Hunter, Conservative
Andrew Robathan, Conservative
Andy King, Labour
Ann Cryer, Labour
Ann Winterton, Conservative
Anthony Steen, Conservative
Archy Kirkwood, Liberal Democrat
Audrey Wise, Labour
Austin Mitchell, Labour
Barry Jones, Labour
Brian White, Labour
Charles Wardle, Conservative
Christine Butler, Labour
Christopher Gill, Conservative
Colin Burgon, Labour
Colin Pickthall, Labour
Dave Watts, Labour
David Amess, Conservative
David Hinchliffe, Labour
David Prior, Conservative
Dennis Skinner, Labour
Denzil Davies, Labour
Desmond Swayne, Conservative
Dominic Grieve, Conservative
Donald Gorrie, Liberal Democrat
Fabian Hamilton, Labour
Gerald Howarth, Conservative
Graham Brady, Conservative
Graham Stringer, Labour
Harry Barnes, Labour
Harry Cohen, Labour
Helen Southworth, Labour
Howard Flight, Conservative
Ian Davidson, Labour/Co-operative
Ian Gibson, Labour
Jane Griffiths, Labour
Janet Dean, Labour
Jeremy Corbyn, Labour
Jim Cunningham, Labour
John Burnett, Liberal Democrat
John Cryer, Labour
John Greenway, Conservative

John Hayes, Conservative
John McDonnell, Labour
John Randall, Conservative
John Townend, Conservative
John Wilkinson, Conservative
Julian Brazier, Conservative
Julian Lewis, Conservative
Kelvin Hopkins, Labour
Laurence Robertson, Conservative
Lembit Opik, Liberal Democrat
Maria Fyfe, Labour
Mark Oaten, Liberal Democrat
Martin Bell, Independent
Martin Smyth, UUP
Mike Hancock, Liberal Democrat
Nicholas Winterton, Conservative
Nick Harvey, Liberal Democrat
Nick Hawkins, Conservative
Nigel Jones, Liberal Democrat
Norman Baker, Liberal Democrat
Norman Godman, Labour
Oliver Letwin, Conservative
Patrick Nicholls, Conservative
Paul Clark, Labour
Paul Goggins, Labour
Paul Tyler, Liberal Democrat
Phil Willis, Liberal Democrat
Philip Hammond, Conservative
Richard Body, Conservative
Richard Livsey, Liberal Democrat
Richard Shepherd, Conservative
Robert Syms, Conservative
Russell Brown, Labour
Sydney Chapman, Conservative
Teddy Taylor, Conservative
Terry Davis, Labour
Tim Collins, Conservative
Tim Loughton, Conservative
Tom Cox, Labour
Vincent Cable, Liberal Democrat
William Ross, UUP

EDM205 - Compulsory Metrication, proposed by David Heath, 16 January 2001

That this House recognises the advantages of using common units of measurement in scientific, technological and professional activities, but believes that no such considerations apply to the sale and purchase of loose goods; does not believe the use of measures familiar to both traders and customers constitutes an intention to confuse the consumer; and believes that inappropriate and heavy-handed attempts to impose metrication by compulsion are counter productive.

David Heath, Liberal Democrat
Andrew George, Liberal Democrat
Bob Russell, Liberal Democrat
Adrian Sanders, Liberal Democrat
Vincent Cable, Liberal Democrat
Ronnie Fearn, Liberal Democrat
Martin Smyth, UUP
Peter Bottomley, Conservative
Steve Webb, Liberal Democrat

Edward Davey, Liberal Democrat
Julian Lewis, Conservative
Jeremy Corbyn, Labour
Colin Breed, Liberal Democrat
Mike Hancock, Liberal Democrat
Norman Baker, Liberal Democrat
Ann Cryer, Labour
John Cummings, Labour
Tony McWalter, Labour/Co-operative
Simon Thomas, Plaid Cymru
Alan Beith, Liberal Democrat
Paul Keetch, Liberal Democrat
Peter Brand, Liberal Democrat
John McDonnell, Labour
Stephen Hepburn, Labour
Gerald Howarth, Conservative
Denzil Davies, Labour
David Chidgey, Liberal Democrat
Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat

EDM205A1 - amendment, proposed by Derek Wyatt, 17 January 2001

... and further notes that the current EU regulations do not apply to wholesalers who still supply their goods in pounds (lbs) and stones, causing retailers, especially family-owned butchers and fishmongers, to have to re-weigh them in grammes and kilos, thus making a mockery of the whole system.

Derek Wyatt, Labour
Rudi Vis, Labour
Paul Tyler, Liberal Democrat
Norman Godman, Labour
William Ross, UUP
Jon Trickett, Labour
Michael Connarty, Labour

EDM302 - Weights and Measures (S.I., 2001, No. 85), proposed by William Hague, 07 February 2001 – background note

1) The question of legality of the whole of the Metric Regulations, in compliance with the relevant EC directives, as extended now by the Units of Measurement Regulations 2001, is the sole issue whereupon depends the outcome of the current trial at Sunderland Magistrates Court, whose judgement is to be delivered on 9th April, subject to probable Appeal. The fundamental constitutional principles at stake in this test case - that no Parliament can bind its successors and that primary legislation (the Weights and Measures Act), that has been amended by Parliament, cannot be superseded by mere regulations deriving their authority from earlier legislation (the 1972 European Communities Act) - are so important as possibly to require ultimate

resolution by the House of Lords. If these Regulations are valid, as the prosecution maintains, then Parliament has abolished itself and the UK constitution is dead. If, however, this House agrees with the defence in upholding those constitutional principles, then all these regulations are *ultra vires*, null and void.

2) Besides, since the law already demands that everything which has to be measured for the purpose of sale must be measured and priced in metric units, voluntary display of imperial equivalent as a "supplementary indication" is no more than the provision of additional information, that cannot be made a criminal offence. Indeed, its prohibition after 31st December 2009 would violate one or more Articles of the ECHR.

3) In any event, the derogation permitting "supplementary indications" has previously been extended (a) from 1st January 1990 to 31st December 1999 and (b) from 1st January 2000 to 31st December 2009, and would inevitably have to be renewed yet again (as envisaged in 13.VI of the "Full Regulatory Impact Study" accompanying the present Regulations), owing to:

- the continuing unpopularity of the regulations among consumers and scale of resistance among retailers,
- requirements for trade with the USA, which shows no sign of abandoning dual marking, and
- the possibility of a legal challenge ref: ECHR.

4) The proposed Regulations would increase the damage to the economy already caused by:

- the dissatisfaction and confusion in domestic trade between suppliers compelled to use metric and customers preferring imperial, and
- confusion in trade with European and other countries arising from variations within the metric system (use of non-SI units and of indigenous metric hybrid units).

5) Further consolidation of the EU metric monopoly is unjustified, given that only in the UK and Ireland is it enforced by criminal penalties.

6) In a single European market, uniformity of weights and measures is clearly a lower priority than a single currency, yet the UK has still not even decided on the merits of that!

William Hague, Conservative
Richard Page, Conservative

David Heathcoat-Amory, Conservative
James Arbuthnot, Conservative
Nick Gibb, Conservative
William Cash, Conservative
Christopher Gill, Conservative
Teresa Gorman, Conservative
Julian Lewis, Conservative
John Bercow, Conservative
Ann Winterton, Conservative
Nicholas Winterton, Conservative
William Ross, UUP

EDM1290 - British Heritage Engineering and Imperial Units, proposed by John Hemming, 18 April 2007

That this House notes the concerns of model engineers and other heritage engineering workers that they may not be allowed to use imperial measurements subsequent to the EU Directive 80/181; recognises that this could do a considerable amount of damage to the maintenance of imperial heritage engineering and the model engineering sector; and calls for an urgent review by the Government of mechanisms to facilitate the continuation of this aspect of British heritage, which may include a permanent derogation from this aspect of the directive facilitating the reporting of measurements in both imperial and metric units.

John Hemming, Liberal Democrat
Bob Russell, Liberal Democrat
Michael Penning, Conservative
Andrew George, Liberal Democrat
Bob Spink, Conservative
Ann Cryer, Labour
Andrew Dismore, Labour
Peter Bottomley, Conservative
David Taylor, Labour
Kelvin Hopkins, Labour
Ann Winterton, Conservative
Mike Hancock, Liberal Democrat
Nicholas Winterton, Conservative
John McDonnell, Labour
Rudi Vis, Labour
John Redwood, Conservative
Greg Pope, Labour
Alan Beith, Liberal Democrat
Vincent Cable, Liberal Democrat
William McCrea, DUP
Janet Dean, Labour
Gregory Campbell, DUP
Brian Jenkins, Labour
Nigel Evans, Conservative
John Leech, Liberal Democrat
Alan Simpson, Labour
Robert Walter, Conservative
Sammy Wilson, DUP
Derek Conway, Conservative
Desmond Swayne, Conservative
Andrew Murrison, Conservative
John Barrett, Liberal Democrat

Nick Harvey, Liberal Democrat
David Crausby, Labour
Nadine Dorries, Conservative
Jo Swinson, Liberal Democrat
Tony Wright, Labour
Humfrey Malins, Conservative

EDM2028 - Imperial Measures and Steve Thoburn, proposed by Philip Davies, 26 July 2007

That this House welcomes the fact that imperial measures will not now become an illegal form of measurement in the UK for the foreseeable future; abhors the fact that traders are not allowed to sell only in imperial measurements even if their customers specifically want to buy items in imperial measurements; calls on the Government to end this attack on people's freedom of choice by immediately bringing forward proposals to remove the legal requirement to sell in metric measurements and to decriminalise the selling of goods in this traditional way; pays tribute to Steve Thoburn, who became a martyr for standing up and fighting for his customers and the rights of the British people; and supports the campaign to award him a posthumous pardon.

Philip Davies, Conservative
John Bercow, Conservative
John Leech, Liberal Democrat
Nicholas Winterton, Conservative
Graham Stringer, Labour
Peter Bottomley, Conservative
Bob Spink, Conservative
Stewart Jackson, Conservative
Gregory Campbell, DUP
Lindsay Hoyle, Labour
John McDonnell, Labour
Ann Winterton, Conservative
Nigel Dodds, DUP
Stephen Crabb, Conservative
Daniel Kawczynski, Conservative
Kelvin Hopkins, Labour
Alan Simpson, Labour
Mark Pritchard, Conservative
Rudi Vis, Labour

Pedestrian signs

Letter to member Stuart Delvin, 14 April 2010, from Department for Transport: Thank you for your telephone enquiry today about distances on signs for pedestrians. I can confirm that all distances on such signs must be in imperial measurements. Metric distances are not permitted. Regulation 11 of the Traffic Signs Regulations 2002 (Part I of SI 2002/3113) states that such signs must be as shown in the diagrams in those Regulations - distances in these diagrams are shown in imperial measurements. In addition Section 14.5 of the Traffic Signs Manual Chapter 7 guides local authorities in this matter. I hope this information is helpful. Yours sincerely, Hugh Arnold

5 April 2000: private members bill by David Lidington - Weights and Measures (Amendment), House of Commons

Mr David Lidington (Aylesbury, Conservative)

I beg to move, That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make the use of imperial weights and measures no longer subject to proceedings for a criminal offence. From 1 January this year, it became a criminal offence - unbelievable though it seems to many millions of our fellow citizens - for a British shopkeeper or market trader to weigh out a pound of apples or meat and to sell that produce to his customers. Any trader who continues to use traditional British units of measurement faces a fine of up to £2,000, the possibility of a term of imprisonment and the prospect, if convicted, of a criminal record, with all that that entails for the person's public reputation. My Bill is intended to put right that absurd and unwanted piece of over-regulation.

UK customers do not want the current law. When I do my weekend shopping in Princes Risborough high street, I am met by local traders and shoppers in my constituency who tell me that they have been made to feel like foreigners in their own country. They do not understand the need for the new law. To make matters more absurd, that law is not even being enforced by the trading standards officers whose duty it is to do so. The fact that no prosecutions seem to have been made since 1 January shows that trading standards officers - for good reason - are fighting shy of bringing proceedings, even though they know well that many traders continue to defy the law because that is what their customers want them to do. I agree with those trading standards officers who have chosen to turn a blind eye; it would be an utterly disgraceful waste of scarce public money were taxpayers' resources to be squandered on such prosecutions.

Nevertheless, the threat of criminal penalties remains on our statute book. The law has a surreal quality. I can order a pound of mince from the butcher, but the butcher is not allowed to sell me a pound - he has to measure out the metric equivalent. The absurdity goes further than that. Goods can be described using traditional measures, but may not be priced or advertised thereby. One can ask to buy so many metres of 54-inch curtaining. That is complete nonsense.

If people want to use metric measurements, they should be entitled to do so. That should be a matter for individual traders and their customers to decide. Indeed, examination of the statute book reveals that, as long ago as the 1860s, the Metric Weights and Measures Act 1864 allowed the use of metric units for contracts. In 1897, the use of metric units for trade was made lawful. My Bill will do nothing to prevent consenting adults from continuing to use metric measurements if they choose. I am against a law that compels people to use metric units when they would prefer to use traditional British units.

The case is usually made that the new law flows from a European directive. I looked up the key measure - European Directive No. 80/181/EEC of 20 December 1979. Like all European Community directives, it has a pream-

ble listing the various reasons why the Community considers that item of legislation to be necessary. The Hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) always referred to such provisions as the "whereas" clauses. The key clause states: *Whereas the laws which regulate the use of units of measurement in the Member States differ from one Member State to another and as a result hinder trade...it is necessary to harmonise laws, regulations and administrative provisions in order to overcome such obstacles.* I draw the House's attention to the key elements: the purpose of the legislation was to prevent the hindrance of trade, and the harmonisation envisaged was in order to overcome obstacles to trade between different member states. I do not see how a criminal penalty on a British greengrocer or butcher who sells loose goods to customers in the high street or town square market has any bearing on free trade within a single European market. The legislation on the statute book flouts the principle of subsidiarity that is enshrined in European treaties and is not proportionate to the problem that the directive purports to identify.

Nor is it true that criminal sanctions are demanded by the directive. The Government have produced no evidence so far that other member states have implemented such sanctions, let alone enforced them.

There was a 10-year derogation from the directive for the sale of loose goods and goods weighed at the point of sale. There is no reason why the Government should not have sought to renew it and extend it much further. Indeed, a derogation was agreed by the Community for packaged goods because that was essential for exports to the United States not only from Britain, but from every country in the European Union. The United States insists on dual marking - metric and imperial - for pre-packaged goods for sale in shops. Ministers could have sought a similar derogation for loose goods for sale in Britain, but they chose not to do so. They have admitted that they did not even discuss the idea with the Commission, or with other member states.

The Government have offered some small comfort, saying that it is possible for traders to provide supplementary labels alongside metric measurements, but that would involve a lot of work and expense for traders. On pain of criminal sanction, they must show metric units and give those priority. My Bill would abolish criminal penalties for a trader who uses pounds, ounces, feet, inches and other traditional British units of measurement by biting on the Weights and Measures Act 1985, which lays down penalties for use by traders of units of measurement other than those prescribed by law.

If traders and customers want to use metric measurements, they should be free to do so, but the same freedom should apply to people who prefer to buy and sell goods in the traditional British way. The law is an example of unnecessary and over-burdensome regulation. It needs to be changed.

Mr. David Lidington, Mr. David Amess, Mr. Nick Hawkins, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Nick St. Aubyn, Mr. John Hayes and Mr. Simon Burns.

Metrication and Engineering

Nigel Barnes*

Never let it be said that we engineers embraced metrification. The pin-stripes at the British Standards Institute did us no favours when they rendered obsolete Whitworth Threads and imperial measures. Don't forget, when news reporters, documentary makers and/or the politically correct want the "independent authoritative" version of any technical issue, it is not to the engineer at the coalface they turn, but to the same eminent pin-stripes who decreed the surrender of these valuable units in the first place.

For the sake of the average Joe, who will have the impression that engineers cannot wait to see the back of "troublesome" imperial units, I tell you now, metrication was foisted upon us. A lot of engineers in more than a few industries still use imperial units regularly and intend to stay that way, obsolete or not. The complication comes not with the nuts and bolts or the imperial hardware but at the paperwork/compliance stage; for example, perfectly ample imperial dimensions must be accompanied with the metric equivalents: "This really does stream the paperwork doesn't it? But no qualms here from our masters about adding unnecessary cost to the job, after all, we mustn't let cost get in the way of a good political cause, must we?"

Thank the Good Lord in Heaven that the circle was defined before the Metrication Board got their hands on it. We are blessed with a 360 degree circle that can be readily divided by 2, 3, 4, 9, 12, 18 ... 90, etc. Adaptability is a luxury to the engineer; "36 inches in one yard; oh, do I detect a pattern here?"

I really do wonder if the same eminent pin-stripes even knew the value of what they were throwing away. Old man Mr Whitworth did not just pluck a system of threads out of the air; a lot of thought and practical experience went into this system of imperial threads. The unfortunate fact is that it is only those engineers who have grappled with engineering options at the unpredictable, rusty, worn, stressed and fractured end of reality who will ever really understand Mr Whitworth's genius. Eternal shame upon the British Standards Institute.

* Engineer for 38 years

Metric downsizing: Kraft Foods reduce Terry's All Gold Chocolates

In April, the former 1 lb and ½ lb boxes of Terry's All Gold chocolates (labelled 450g and 225g) were downsized to 400g and 200g, a decrease in weight of 11%. At Sainsbury's, the price of the 225g boxes was reduced from £3.56 to £3.49, a reduction of 2%, meaning a price rise in real terms of 9%.

BWMA to Kraft Foods, 1 May 2010: I am writing on behalf of the British Weights and Measures Association, which campaigns for the retention of UK units of measure. We are disappointed that Kraft Foods recently replaced its 225 gram box (i.e. ½ lb) of Terry's All Gold in favour of a metric-rounded 200 grams. Please explain why Kraft Foods did this. The number of chocolates was reduced from 22 to 20. Did Kraft Foods reduce the price?

Kraft Foods to BWMA, 4 May 2010: Thank you for contacting us regarding Terry's All Gold chocolates. The reason for the reduction in size of the chocolates from 225g to 200g was to bring us in line with our competitors. Thanks again for your email. Kind regards, Julia Fenton, Consumer Relations Team.

Pink Imperial

Warwick Cairns writes: To celebrate their 25th birthday, the upmarket shirt-makers of London's Thomas Pink have created a new range, made in Britain and exclusively designed and described in imperial measures. They're not cheap, but each shirt is made of 38 separate pieces, sewn at 18 stitches to the inch, and comes in one of two grades.

The range starts with the 170 grade shirt, called that because it's made of two-fold poplin which uses 170 hanks of thread to every imperial pound of cloth. A hank, they explain, is 840 yards. The top-of-the-range model, at £175 a time, is the 200 grade shirt, with 200 hanks to the pound. And the name of this range of shirts? The Imperial.

For celebrating the imperial system, and for bringing long-forgotten units like the hank back into the modern world, BWMA has awarded them this year's *Golden Rule*. Liz Sowden, Thomas Pink Ltd's Head of Marketing, said, "We would be delighted to accept your award and are thrilled for our Imperial shirt to be recognised in this way – thank you" (22 April 2010). You can read an article about the Imperial Collection on GQ Magazine's website, at <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/style/articles/2010-03/23/gq-style-news-thomas-pink-imperial-white-shirt>

Letter from Lakeland, kitchenware retailer, to member Stuart Delvin, 11 August 2009

Thank you for your communication about metric measures replacing imperial ones, and us maintaining the imperial measures. I appreciate that you have a desire to maintain the imperial units of measure. From our perspective we will continue to use imperial measures for as long as we consider our customers wish to see them being used and can relate to them. I cannot guarantee they will be maintained but currently and for the foreseeable future we have no plans to go purely metric ... Sam Rayner, Managing Director.

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