

Energy

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Rt Hon Peter Walker MBE MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and
Food

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Whitehall Place
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3 July 1981

Dear Sir

OFFSHORE LICENSING

Although 'E' Committee decided last week that we should not go ahead with an eighth round of offshore licensing at this time, your letter of 22 June raises the general issue of the impact of oil licensing on the fishing industry which warrants a response.

I can assure you that I am most conscious of the need to ensure that oil activity co-exists harmoniously with other users of the UKCS (in particular fishermen) and that interference with their interests is minimised.

I have already done much in this direction over the past 18 months:-

- (i) Together with the oil and fishing industries, my Department has developed a Code of Practice to protect the interests of fishermen in the sensitive and much-fished area of the Inner Moray Firth. My Department has indicated to your officials that we would be prepared to consider the development of a code for other specific areas where a sound need can be established.
- (ii) Representations from my Department have led the UK Offshore Operators Association, who fund the debris compensation scheme, to extend its scope and limits.
- (iii) My Department's oil spill contingency planning requirements for Seventh Round blocks close to shore involve prior consultations with fisheries inspectors on the identification of sensitive areas and the adoption by the operators of measures to ensure their protection where this is practicable.

In future licensing rounds I intend that the Seventh Round practice will be followed allowing a consultation period after the preliminary announcement which will give ample opportunity for fishing (and other) interests to make their case to me about any particularly sensitive areas.

My Department's past record indicates the seriousness with which we treat this issue, and I have no intention of relaxing my requirements in that respect.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours.

Jan

D A R HOWELL

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