

010
CONFIDENTIAL



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

12 December 1986

Dear Robin,

NBP

THE LESSONS OF CHERNOBYL

The Lord President held a meeting on 10 December in the Large Ministerial Conference Room in the House of Commons. Besides your Secretary of State, the Secretary of State for Energy, the Paymaster General, Ministers of State for the Armed Forces, Transport and the Home Office, the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State for Scotland, and Health and Social Security, Mr Unwin and Brigadier Budd of the Cabinet Office were present.

The Lord President stated that the purpose of the meeting was to resolve the difficult issue of lead department responsibility in the event of a nuclear accident overseas affecting the United Kingdom, it having proved impossible to obtain agreement on this matter in the Lessons of Chernobyl Working Group.

Your Secretary of State said that he thought it important to have a designated lead Minister to co-ordinate the Government's response in the event of such an accident and to act as the main spokesman in Parliament. He believed that the lead Minister should also be closely involved in supervisory contingency planning and questioned whether it was really necessary to distinguish between nuclear accidents at home or overseas so far as the appointment of a lead Minister was concerned.

During discussion, there was general agreement on the importance of the role to be played by a lead Minister and his department, with appropriate support from the Cabinet Office and other relevant Departments and agencies, in the event of a nuclear accident; that differences between the kinds of accidents that could occur made it acceptable to have different lead Ministers in respect of domestic nuclear accidents; that the well practised current contingency plans for UK accidents stood a good chance of working effectively, although some revisions would be appropriate in the light of Chernobyl; that public perception of the likely credibility of a lead Minister would need to be taken into account in deciding the allocation of this responsibility and that a Cabinet Committee would not be the best way of discharging lead Minister responsibilities.

Robin Young Esq

CONFIDENTIAL

Your Secretary of State then accepted the Lord President's invitation to undertake the lead Minister role in the event of any future nuclear accident outside the UK and it was agreed that, with the help of the Cabinet Office, he should be authorised to call such meetings as he thought necessary to facilitate detailed contingency planning.

It was further agreed that the proposed Prime Ministerial statement on the progress of the post Chernobyl work (in the form of a written answer to a planned PQ) should include a specific reference to the lead responsibility of your Secretary of State and that arrangements for clearing the revised statement and submitting it to the Prime Minister would be made by the Cabinet Office.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Private Secretaries to all those who attended the meeting, and to David Norgrove (No 10), Brian Unwin and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

Joan

JOAN MACNAUGHTON
Private Secretary

