

SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION

MEETING with the SCOTTISH OFFICE
regarding the future of P.M.B. in
EDINBURGH on FRIDAY, 2nd APRIL, 1993.

PRESENT: Scottish Office: Ian Whitelaw, Gordon Brown and Mrs. Campbell;
S.P.T.A.: David Stewart, Logan Milne and R.D. Hunter.

Messrs. Stewart and Milne explained to the Department Officials the reasons why S.P.T.A. considered that it was most desirable that the P.M.B. remain in existence with power as at present to control the area of potato plantings and to provide market support. The Department Officials made it clear that they understood all of the arguments being put forward but also indicated that it was likely that the P.M.B. would cease to exist. They explained that at the Second Reading of the Agricultural Bill on Tuesday, 23rd March (at which Gordon Brown and Mrs. Campbell had been present) there was little opposition voiced against the abolition of the P.M.B. They added, however, that it is possible that more opposition may be voiced during the Committee stages of the Bill. The Department Officials also stated that, unlike a number of years ago when it had also been suggested that the P.M.B. might be abolished, on this occasion there was very little Consumer opposition to the proposal that the P.M.B. should be disbanded. The Department suggested that it would be helpful from S.P.T.A.'s point of view to get a copy of the Hansard Report on the Second Reading and also to consider the possibility of lobbying members of the Committee who will be debating the Agricultural Bill.

It became clear that although S.P.T.A. had requested a meeting with Sir Hector Munro to discuss the future of the P.M.B., it was in fact the Scottish Office who had been anxious to have a meeting with representatives of the Potato Industry in Scotland including S.P.T.A. Their reason for wanting the meeting was to encourage S.P.T.A. and other Organisations to start planning for a situation in which there was no P.M.B. Mr. Whitelaw explained that in terms of the Agricultural Bill in the event of the P.M.B. being disbanded it would be up to the P.M.B. to make proposals with regard to its successor or successors. Mr. Whitelaw urged S.P.T.A. to keep closely in touch with the P.M.B. in order hopefully to influence any such proposals which it may put forward. Mr. Whitelaw gave an example in which the P.M.B. could be replaced with a U.K. Development Board. He suggested that S.P.T.A. should identify the sort of body it wanted to replace the P.M.B. in Scotland and to persuade the P.M.B. to support of its point of view. Mr. Whitelaw stated that the decision to disband P.M.B. could be taken at any time and the Time Table of Events thereafter would be for the Organisation or Organisations replacing the P.M.B. to be in situ within twelve months of that date. Mr. Whitelaw accordingly urged the Potato Industry in Scotland to "put its house in order". He warned against a possible situation whereby Producer Groups from outwith Scotland end up by taking over the Scottish Potato Industry. To counter that/

that possibility he suggested that urgent thought be given to the formation of Potato Producer Groups as envisaged in the Potato Regime. Mr. Brown stated that only very limited finance would be available to assist with the setting up of Producer Groups. Any finance which would be available would be intended to "kick Start" such Groups.

S.S.P.D.C. The discussions, with the Department's full approval, moved over to considering S.S.P.D.C. The S.P.T.A. representatives expressed concern regarding the apparent lack of control which Mr. Stobo, the President of S.S.P.D.C. seemed to have over his Chief Executive, John Bethel. Mr. Whitelaw expressed confidence in the ability of the Chairman. S.P.T.A. also voiced unease regarding speculation concerning Mr. and Mrs. Bethel's apparent personal involvement in works of art from the Ukraine. S.P.T.A. also stated that it considered that Mr. Bethel was concentrating an excessive amount of his time in endeavouring to develop a market for potatoes in Russia while neglecting to promote the sales of Scotch seed potatoes in its main market, England. Mr. Whitelaw said that he noted the comments of S.P.T.A. He also reminded S.P.T.A. that at the present time S.S.P.D.C. was preparing its Five Year Plan. He believed that any criticism levelled in respect of the present activities of Mr. Bethel should be addressed in the context of the Five Year Plan.

This terminated the Meeting.