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C.(60) 32

19th February, 1960

COPY NO. 51

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LAW OF THE SEA: ICELAND

Memorandum by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

In accordance with the conclusions of the Cabinet (CC (60) 5th Conclusions, Minute 2) I saw the leaders of the fishing industry last night. They have made an unexpectedly generous offer. They propose that for the duration of the Law of the Sea Conference they should withdraw their trawlers entirely from the Icelandic fishing grounds and send them elsewhere.

2. The advantages of this offer are:-

- (i) It would avoid any implicit recognition of the 12-mile limit round Iceland by withdrawing only just beyond it.
- (ii) It would prevent any possibility of incidents just within or without the 12 miles, and there would then be no need to maintain Naval protection vessels in the area.
- (iii) It would be a handsome and imaginative gesture on the part of the industry towards the Conference.

3. The disadvantages are:-

- (i) It would mean an early announcement so as to enable owners to issue new sailing instructions to their boats.
- (ii) There would be greater fishing pressure on other grounds, and this might be resented by Norway and Denmark.
- (iii) There would be a shortage of fish and the gap might be filled by foreign trawlers, including Icelandic vessels. There might be refusals to unload Icelandic fish, giving rise to incidents in our ports.
- (iv) It might be suggested that by withdrawing entirely, the fishing industry was showing that they could do without the Icelandic grounds, including the Continental shelf.

4. We need to consider this offer urgently. In doing so we shall have to keep in mind the position of the good officers and what further part, if any, they can play. If the offer were to be accepted, the fishing industry would need to start making arrangements very soon. There is, too, a real danger of the proposal leaking out. Because of the time factor I am, with the Lord Chancellor's agreement, circulating this paper direct to the Cabinet.

J.H.

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and  
Food, S.W.1.

19th February, 1960.

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