

SECRETC.P.(50) 147COPY NO. 3230TH JUNE, 1950CABINETFISH: ENCOURAGEMENT OF SALESMemorandum by the Minister of Food

At their meeting on 27th June (C.M.(50) 39th Conclusions, Minute 2(3)), the Cabinet invited me, after consultation with the Ministers concerned with public services, to submit proposals for increasing the consumption of fish in this country.

2. In the short time available, my Department has consulted the Ministry of Health and the War Office and has considered suggestions that the Ministry of Food should encourage the sale of fish by undertaking an advertising campaign and by trying, on behalf of the trade, to stimulate sales to the Services and to State hospitals.

3. Advertising Campaign

At various times during the past ten years when the Ministry of Food controlled fish prices and was responsible for distribution, it engaged in publicity to press sales of fish. Many other foods were scarce and the view taken - and I think quite rightly - was that in these circumstances it was the business of the Government to point out the useful and nourishing substitute in fish, and that it was being sold at controlled prices and fairly distributed.

When freedom was restored to the trade, the question was raised whether the Ministry should continue this form of publicity. Campaigns of this kind by the Ministry of Food have now a much more limited value than they had, but what also was in question was whether it was now appropriate to expend public money on assisting private traders in their business. This was no new principle; it had, for example, come up before on fruits and vegetables. There is indeed no reason why, if the Government undertakes such tasks as these, it should stop at fish. If fish, why not other foods or any other product which the producers are having difficulty in selling?

This policy was stated at a meeting on 26th January of representatives of the Ministry of Food and the Fisheries Departments and of representatives of the leading Associations of Producers and Distributors (including fish friers) of white fish. The Ministry's argument was accepted without criticism, and the delegates agreed that each section of the industry should prepare a statement of its views on publicity. At a further meeting, on 10th May, the representative of the British Trawlers' Federation, which conducted a large and very successful publicity campaign between the wars, said that the Federation was working on plans for another campaign. If it were accepted, the Federation would consult with various sections of the trade with a view to co-ordinated action.



It seems to me to be clearly right in principle that this is a responsibility which the industry can be expected to take, and are apparently ready to take. Certainly in practice they would be more skilled: they alone have the means to ensure that their performance will be related to the needs of the various sections of the trade and in tune with their propaganda.

I feel that the stimulation of fish consumption by advertising is a long term matter, and it has of course been recommended as a function of the proposed Commission.

#### 4. Consumption of fresh fish by the Services

The Army rationing scale for troops stationed at home provides for a consumption of  $\approx 1/6$  ozs. of fish per head per week, filleted weight; this is exclusive of herrings, kippers, bloaters and canned fish. The average civilian consumption for all fish, other than canned fish, is now 7 to 8 ozs. per week, filleted weight. In addition troops obtain a certain quantity of fish through N.A.A.F.I. canteens. Each unit also receives a cash allowance ( $5\frac{3}{4}$ d. per head per day) for expenditure on food; very little of this is spent on fish; it goes mostly on manufactured meats, pickles and sauces.

Fried fish is the most popular form of fish in the Army, and the War Office point out that consumption is therefore governed to some extent by the allowance of fat. On the other hand, even if the fat allowance were unlimited, it is doubtful whether fish consumption would be substantially increased. Certainly it is the case that fat supplies are not now responsible for holding back sales of fried fish to civilians; for some time past fish friers have not taken up their full fat allocation. The War Office go on to point out that extra fish could be eaten only at the expense of other foods, and that the diet might become unbalanced. It seems doubtful whether the troops would stand for much more fish, a view which is borne out by the low expenditure on fish out of the cash allowance.

In view of the opinion of the War Office, and of the fact that the Army's present consumption of fish compares very favourably with that of the general public, it does not seem that increased consumption in the Army can make any material contribution to the offtake of white fish. I think that to try to force more fish on to soldiers than they are ready to accept would be bad policy and might serve the industry ill in the long term. To give National Service soldiers a surfeit of fish might prejudice their consumption of fish when they return to civilian life.

#### 5. The Hospitals

The Ministry of Health have agreed to ask their Dietician Advisers who visit hospitals to draw the attention of the hospital staffs to the present abundant supplies of fish and to encourage





increased consumption. They consider that this approach will prove more effective than, for example, the issue of a circular.

6. My Department will, of course, continue to mention fish as part of its general food advice service. I fear, however, that there is little more that my Department can do to increase consumption, and that it must be left to the trade to improve the quality of their product and to make its purchase by the public a more attractive proposition.

M.W.

Ministry of Food, S.W.1,

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