



UKMA news

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Campaigning for a single rational system of measurement

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Ministers determined to waste taxpayers' money

The Minister of State at the Department for Transport (DfT), Dr Stephen Ladyman, in his reply to UKMA's Chairman on 3 October, has refused to consider the possibility of combining the forthcoming review of local speed limits with carrying out its legal obligation to convert to metric road signage.

On 8 August, the DfT issued Circular 1/06 "Setting local speed limits" giving advice to local authorities on reviewing speed limits on locally controlled 'A' and 'B' roads. UKMA wrote to Dr Ladyman on 7 September asking that this local review should be combined with a general upgrade to metric (km/h) speed

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EU reprieve for lbs & oz?

A consultation paper from the European Commission raises the disturbing possibility that lbs and oz may not after all be phased out after 2009. Unfortunately, preliminary indications are that the British Government may support this retrograde proposal.

The EU's Units of Measurement Directive applies to "economic, public health, public safety and administrative purposes." When the Directive was last revised (in 1999) it was agreed that "supplementary indications" (imperial and other non-metric measures) would be permitted for a further ten years, but the Commission was also instructed to bring forward a further report discussing the whole issue. The recent [paper](#) is the first step in this process.

The main ostensible reason for allowing dual marking was that the differing labelling regimes in the EU and the USA would

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UKMA launches blog

UKMA launched its blog site on 15 December, and already it appears to have attracted over 1000 viewings of specific pages within the website. It thus seems to have got off to a good start

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mean that packers would require separate packaging (and possibly product descriptions and manuals) for the two markets - and this was claimed to be a significant business cost. Thus, the USA was given 10 years in which to amend its Fair Packaging and Labeling Act (FPLA), after which the Directive would come fully into force.

At the same time the UK Government has taken advantage of this ten year deferral to authorise the continued use of supplementary indications in the pricing of "loose goods" sold from bulk (e.g. meat, fish, vegetables etc).

However, the USA has made no progress at amending the FPLA at federal level, and there is now no realistic prospect of the 2009 deadline being met. The Commission have therefore suggested - albeit tentatively - that as an incentive to the USA to allow metric-only labelling at the federal level, there should be a further ten year (or even a permanent) permission for supplementary indications. To quote:

"It would seem that to maintain an incentive for the US to adapt its federal legislation to allow metric only labelling should be welcomed [sic]. It saves producers all over the world from needing to relabel their products for the US market. The 2009 deadline has worked for state authorities so a deadline a bit further in time could work for the federal authorities.

The sanction of a clear deadline at a certain date, enticing as it may seem, would, however, backfire if really carried out. A metric-only EU would force US exporters to relabel all products they export to the EU. This would be a strange way of thanking the US for adapting their state and federal laws to conform to international standards. By requiring metric-only labeling the EU would be imposing a new barrier on trade to products from the US.

It would seem that there is reason to indefinitely extend the period of allowing supplementary markings on products on the EU market. This would allow all imports marked with the correct SI-marking to circulate freely on the EU market."

Leaving aside the somewhat tortuous English (presumably this is a translation), the Commission's logic is difficult to follow. If the US Congress has not responded to the 2009 deadline, what reason is there to suppose they will respond to a further deadline - let alone to total abolition of the requirement for metric-only labelling? This reads like the Commission bottling out of a confrontation.

Government support for supplementary indications?

Unfortunately, there are signs that the UK Government may actually support a further extension of the derogation permitting imperial measures in the labelling of packages and even in the pricing of loose goods. On 27 November, in answer to a Parliamentary Question in the House of Lords, junior DTI Minister, Lord Truscott, said: "The Government think that there is a strong case for extending this permission beyond [2009] and, perhaps, permanently." The full exchange with various serially Europhobic peers can be seen on the Hansard website at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199900/ldhansrd/pdvn/lds06/text/61127-0001.htm#0611273000006> (make sure you get the whole of the URL)

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Later Lord Truscott admitted that "of course there are arguments on both sides. We need to take both strands of opinion into account."

However, the tone of the Minister's unscripted remarks leaves little doubt that he personally is in the imperialist camp, thus confounding the Government's official policy that "the United Kingdom should - in stages - switch from imperial to metric units of measurement for an ever-increasing range of uses" (to quote the Prime Minister in a letter to Lord Howe in 2004).

UKMA's view

UKMA will be commenting forcibly on the Commission's paper. Amongst other things, we are likely to argue that:

1. The metric system (SI) is the world standard - not just a European system. It is quite reasonable to ask all countries - however large and powerful they may be - to adjust their own laws to conform to international standards if they wish to engage in international trade.
2. We question whether re-labelling for different markets really is a significant business cost.
3. The alleged problem of dual labelling could be solved by a simple derogation to permit dual labelling only for imported goods from a non-metric country and for goods originally produced within the EU for export to a non-metric country.
4. Any concession on supplementary indications should only apply to labelling of packaged goods (and to their product descriptions and manuals) - and **not to the pricing of loose goods sold from bulk.**

The Commission is inviting comments from "stakeholders" and any other interested party, either by e-mail to entr-metrology@ec.europa.eu

or by post to:

European Commission
DG Enterprise and Industry (ENTR/H/6)
105, avenue des Nerviens / Nervierslaan 105
B-1049 Brussel / Bruxelles

The closing date is 1 March 2007.

It is of vital importance that UKMA members write individually to the Commission (as above) and also to the DTI, and to their own MP and MEPs.

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limits.

The background is that the UK has accepted an obligation under EU law to "fix a date" for converting speed limits and road signs to metric units, but no date has yet been fixed. Clearly, this obligation will have to be carried out eventually, but in the meantime the DfT is encouraging traffic authorities to continue to erect new or replacement imperial signage. Thus, there will obviously be duplication of expenditure if the new imperial signs have to be replaced with metric signs within their expected lifetime (ca. 10 years). UKMA's proposal would have avoided these additional costs.

A copy of the Minister's reply appears on p. 5.

Comment on the Minister's reply

It will be apparent that the Minister has chosen to misinterpret UKMA's proposal as if we were suggesting that speed limits on A and B roads would change to km/h while trunk roads and unclassified roads would remain in mph. He then argues that it would be confusing and unsafe to have inconsistent signage, and he therefore cannot agree to this suggestion.

It is of course a standard rhetorical trick to distort your opponent's case and then refute an argument that he did not make. It is disappointing that the Minister should have stooped to such a discreditable tactic.

Perhaps it is a sign of the emptiness of the DfT's case that they are not prepared to face the true facts and deal with the real arguments. In February, when UKMA published "[Metric Signs Ahead](#)" (ISBN 978-0-9552351-0-8), they produced incredible cost figures to try to kill off the debate, and dismissed metrication as "a waste of taxpayers' money".

Dr Ladyman's letter demonstrates that it is actually the DfT who are determined to waste taxpayers' money rather than risk losing a few votes in the short term.

Deliberate mistake

Did anyone spot the deliberate mistake in our Autumn 2006 issue?

On p. 3, the formula for calculating the Body Mass Index was inverted. It should of course have been:

(your weight in kg) divided by (your height in metres) squared - i.e. kg/m^2

(Actually, the mistake was not deliberate, but nobody's perfect)



Department for
Transport

From the Minister of State

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Our Ref: SL/022135/06

- 3 OCT 2006

Dear Mr Paice

Thank you for your letter of 7 September about metrication and the review of local speed limits.

The Government's position on the metrication of speed limits remains unchanged. However, there are both practical and safety reasons why it is not feasible to ask Traffic Authorities to change to metric speed limits alongside their reviews of local speed limits.

As explained in the Department's new guidance, local speed limits are set by Traffic Authorities in situations where the national speed limit is not deemed appropriate. The national speed limits themselves are unaffected by the local speed limit reviews. Furthermore Traffic Authorities are required only to review speed limits on their 'A' and 'B' roads. Whilst the reviews should result in changes to some speed limits and signs, a large proportion of roads are therefore expected to remain unchanged following the reviews.

I am sure that you will agree that it is essential to have total consistency across speed limit signing and that it is not practical to adopt a piecemeal approach to the change to metric speed limit signs. Such an approach would lead to major public confusion and have a substantial negative impact on safety. This is simply not something that I am prepared to accept. I am afraid therefore that I cannot agree to your suggestion.

STEPHEN LADYMAN

cont. from p.1

with a reasonable amount of interest in the short time that it has been in the public domain. It is expected that this figure will increase substantially as the site becomes known and particularly as it is found by Google and other search engines.

The Committee hopes that the blog will develop into a source of lively and authoritative comment on current issues that relate to metrication. Members can help by visiting the site regularly and posting their own comments or submitting draft articles for posting. Indeed some (though not all) of the comments which appear on Googlegroups could equally well appear on the blog. They would then be accessible to a wider audience.

The decision that UKMA should venture into the field of blogging was taken by the Committee following the discussion at the AGM. Various options were considered, and, rather than try to construct the blog within our own website, it was decided to use the WordPress blogging system, and to set up a separate website (at modest cost) to allow the use of this system. This website, called 'Metric Views', can be found at <http://www.metricviews.org.uk/>.

The administrator ("blogmaster") is David Marsh. He is responsible for overall management including the design of the webpage. As a starting point, this is based on the template provided by WordPress but it may evolve over time. Phil Hall (web@metric.org.uk) will give backup assistance in emergency.

Editors, responsible for moderating comments from the general public, will be the Chairman, Robin Paice (chair@metric.org.uk), with the Secretary, Derek Pollard (secretary@metric.org.uk) as backup. Committee members have been authorised to post articles without moderation (although not necessarily expressing the formal views of UKMA).

As well as commenting on existing articles, other members are requested to contribute original articles, which should be e-mailed to one of the blog team (Robin, Derek or Phil) or use blogteam@metricviews.org.uk. To avoid technical problems in inserting articles into the blog, articles should preferably be sent **in plain text format only**. Word processor documents or HTML -formatted emails cause problems and may not be usable. The blog team may edit articles before publishing them.

The general public is invited to post comments on published articles. These will be moderated to prevent offensive, irrelevant or otherwise unsuitable comments. It is hoped to respond to genuine points or questions.

So far (up to 30 December), 13 articles ("posts") have been written, on subjects ranging from road signs to football, and these have attracted 24 comments. The most commented on was an article about a BBC Radio 4 programme on the National Consumer Council's recent report on consumer perceptions of weights and measures legislation. This has brought 8 comments so far, including responses from the Deputy Chief Executive of the NCC, the editor of the radio programme, and a former officer of the Trading Standards Institute.

Lord Howe is 80

UKMA's principal patron, Lord Howe of Aberavon, celebrated his 80th birthday on 20 December. Geoffrey works tirelessly for our campaign, lobbying the many influential people whom he meets in the course of his Parliamentary duties. We wish him many happy returns



AGM/Annual Conference - 14 July 2007

The 2007 AGM and Annual Conference will be held at the University of London Union (ULU), Malet Street, London, WC1 7HY, from 10:00 to 16:00. As in previous years it is hoped to deal with the formal AGM business in less than an hour, which, assuming half an hour lunch break, will leave about 4½ hours for presentations and discussion.

Planning is still at an early stage, but, as last year, it is hoped to have a high profile visiting speaker. Other topics are likely to include:

- Strategy review and campaign targets
- Future work programme
- Progress report on our various websites
- Dual labelling, supplementary indications and 2010 (the EU and DTI consultation)
- "Metric Views" (UKMA's blog) - progress report
- Further thoughts on advancing the case for metric road signs

So please put the date in your diary.

Chairman's New Year message

Dear Member

My message this year will be brief - partly because most of what I would want to say is covered in articles in this Newsletter.

The main point that I want to make is that we should not be discouraged by the stiff resistance that we are still encountering from the forces of reaction, ignorance, apathy and unreason.

- Although the European Commission initially appears ready to bottle out of the confrontation with the USA over accepting American exports labelled in "US customary measures", there is still plenty of time to persuade the Commission otherwise. UKMA members can play a part in this.
- The resistance of the Department for Transport (DfT) to metrication needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. Organisations will always deny any intention to change policy - until they are ready to announce the change. The flawed and disingenuous justifications advanced by the DfT for doing nothing simply demonstrate that they have run out of arguments. UKMA is trying to arrange for an independent audit of their absurd cost estimates, and it is hoped that this will further undermine the DfT's increasingly untenable position.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that slow but tangible progress is being made in the phasing out of imperial measures in retailing. Much attention is given to the glaring exceptions that flout the law, and to local councils that turn a blind eye - Portobello Road market in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, for example - but in reality over 75% of food shopping is done in the "big four" supermarket chains (Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda and Morrison) and significant proportions in other supermarkets such as Somerfield, Waitrose and the Co-op. Practice varies from branch to branch, but increasingly branch managers are not bothering to put prices per lb or per pint on shelf labels, and customers are asking for salami in grams. There is increasing acceptance of metrication by the "silent majority".

Finally, may I ask members to support UKMA's latest project - our blog, "Metric Views" (<http://www.metricviews.org.uk/>). Visit it regularly (you could even make it your home page), comment on existing articles and send drafts of new articles to one of the blog team.

I wish all members a successful New Year - both in their personal lives and in their work for the campaign.

Best wishes

Robin Paice

Chairman

Competition winner

In our last issue, we ran a competition to guess where this signpost (photographed by Derek Pollard) was situated.

The answer was Alice Springs, NT, Australia.

Correct answers were received from Andrew Miller of Oldbury, West Midlands, and John Jones of Sterrebeek, Belgium, and both have received a prize.



Current Committee

At the request of a member, we give below the contact details of the current (2006-7) Committee:

Chairman: Robin Paice (tel: 023 9275 5268, e-mail: robin.paice@virgin.net)

Secretary: Derek Pollard (tel: 020 8374 6997, e-mail: derek.pollard@lineone.net)

Treasurer: Phil Durden (tel: 01903 813603, e-mail: phil@durden.clara.co.uk)

Other members:

Chris Keenan (tel: 01242 525396, e-mail: ukma@iledere.me.uk)

Phil Hall (tel: 01604 713887, e-mail: p.hall@ukma.org.uk)

Martin Ward (tel: 01952 676246, e-mail: metric@m3m3m3.freemove.co.uk)

with one vacancy

Jobs vacant

Treasurer

Phil Durden has been UKMA's Treasurer since our formation in 2002. As a result of increased personal commitments, he needs to give up the job as from the next AGM (July 2007). **So we shall need a new Treasurer.** Responsibilities comprise:

- Looking after UKMA's cash and bank account
- Keeping records of income and expenditure, and producing accounts
- Submitting the accounts for annual audit
- Dealing with subscription renewals
- Advising the Committee and the AGM of UKMA's financial position
- Participating in Committee meetings (approx monthly) by telephone conference call to decide UKMA policy and actions

The sums involved are not large, and the number of transactions is modest. Apart from the monthly Committee meeting and the AGM reporting, there are few set timetables or deadlines, so the job can be fitted in with other responsibilities.

Obviously, the job is very important, **so can we have a volunteer prepared to put his/her name forward for election in 2007?**

Committee member

Last year's elections did not produce a full Committee, and there is still one vacancy.

The principal function of the Committee is to decide UKMA's policy and authorise actions, including payments. It meets approximately monthly for about an hour by telephone conference call (the cost can be reclaimed) at a mutually convenient time (hitherto 18:00 on a Monday - but this could be changed by agreement). Committee members can volunteer to take on other one-off tasks as they arise (e.g. draft a letter to a Government Department).

The broader the Committee, the more representative it will be of UKMA, so the vacancy ought to be filled if possible. The Committee has power to co-opt, so if any member is interested, please advise the Secretary or Chairman.