



UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Campaigning for a single rational system of measurement

Volume 5, No. 1

www.ukma.org.uk

May 2007

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Business as usual (despite the fuss)

The story so far

In the December 2006 edition of UK News, we reported on the consultation document issued by the European Commission regarding revision of the Units of Measurement Directive. This can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/prepack/unitmeas/uni_ms_en.htm

The Committee submitted a response on behalf of UKMA, and several members made individual submissions.

The responses were published early in April, and can be found through the link above. The Commission has divided them into seven categories, which makes for easy browsing. The UK Government response appears under “Authorities”.

As expected, the main areas of controversy related to supplementary indications (SIs), and to the UK exemptions for road traffic signs, draught beer and cider, land registration and precious metals. In general, industry federations were in favour of maintaining the status quo, while many “private persons” and “professional teachers” looked to an end to SI’s, and, in the case of the UK, a speedy completion of metric conversion.

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Events then took an unexpected turn

Tuesday 8 May

19:03 Guardian Unlimited (the on-line version of the paper) carries a Press Association report under the heading "Victory in imperial measures battle". This appears to be based on a press release by Neil Herron (a Sunderland former fishmonger and anti-EU campaigner). It says, "Campaigners fighting plans to abolish imperial measures have claimed victory for pounds and ounces". The story can be found at:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uklatest/story/0,,-6617456,00.html>

Wednesday 9 May

Most of the national dailies and "The Scotsman" carry a similar story. In the Daily Express and Daily Mail (surprise), the story makes it to the front page. From 6:00, Radio 4's "Today" programme also carries the story and has an interview with Neil Herron. Robin Paice e-mails the programme asking for an opportunity to reply - but receives no response.

6:57 One of our members is up early and reports that the story has appeared on BBC News 24.

Robin alerts Derek and Roz Denny (our press Officer) to the need to be available for radio and TV interviews.

Mr Herron, now styled as Campaigns Director of the Metric Martyrs Defence Fund (MM), appears on BBC Breakfast.

A member notes that the BBC News web site has links to the web sites of BWMA and MM but none to ours. He contacts the BBC, and later in the day a link to the UKMA web site is added.

11:00 Article by Michael White appears on Commentisfree.guardian.co.uk, looking at the implications of the measurement story for relations between Whitehall and Brussels.

11:09 A letter is circulated by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to those who responded to the Commission Consultation (see page 1) advising that the responses to the consultation can now be accessed on the Commission web site, and that "the UK has expressed its full support to the continued use of supplementary indications after December 2009 without limit of time". Is a turf war breaking out among the politicians over this issue?

During the day, Robin and Roz record several radio interviews, and Sky News provides an opportunity for UKMA to respond to the story.

21:40 Mr Herron in Newcastle faces Derek in London, live on BBC News 24.

One of our members reports later that the measurement story appears in the Toronto Star, under the heading "Britain keeps its imperial ways", with the last word given to UKMA (taken from a feed from the BBC News 24 broadcast)

Postings on the UKMA Google Group surge throughout the day as members exchange views and information, particularly about opportunities to post comments beneath newspaper articles. Total postings for the day on the Google Group exceed 50.

Thursday 10 May

Media attention is moving away from imperial measures as it becomes clear that this will be the day that the PM lets us into his secret.

An article by Melanie McDonagh in the Times annoys members as she does not "know what 2.7 kilos were". Where has she been since sugar packs went metric in 1974? Does she never take a holiday abroad?

By midday, the story seems to have died. And Mr Blair seems to be on his way out.

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Friday 11 May

Mr Brown is now the focus of media attention.

There is still foreign interest in the measurements story, and Robin is interviewed by radio stations in Israel and Montreal, Canada.

“The Press” of York carries a story and a comment from an unhappy market trader, who thinks she must now change her metric scales to imperial ones. “It is so confusing for our customers because they have only got used to thinking in kilos and grams”. Comments appear on “The Press” web site, reassuring the trader that nothing has changed.

UKMA Committee agrees a statement that attempts to clarify the issues and posts this on the UKMA website, www.metric.org.uk, and on the blog, www.metricviews.org.uk

Wednesday 16 May

The DTI confirm, in response to an enquiry from UKMA, “that it is the Commission’s intention in due course to bring forward a proposal that the permissions to use supplementary indications be extended indefinitely. Its precise terms will be subject to the agreement of the European Parliament and the Council.” And in relation to price marking, the DTI says it “can confirm that the relevant law remains unchanged.” So business as usual, then.

For the record

The members who helped to put the pro-metric view on 9 May are too numerous to mention individually. All have the satisfaction of knowing that, thanks in part to their contributions, you-know-who and his friends did not have it all their own way.

Currently, we have no recording of any of the radio broadcasts by Robin and Roz.

For recordings of the TV news broadcasts in which UKMA was invited to participate, please follow these links:

For Sky News, 9 May, 11:40 (5.0MB)

http://www.stefenfreund.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/SKYNEWS_070509.wmv

For BBC News 24, 9 May, 21:40 (5.3MB)

http://www.stefenfreund.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/BBCNews24_070509.wmv

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Committee for 2007-8

One nomination for each of the officers was received, and the following were elected:

Chairman	Robin Paice
Treasurer	Tony Wilson
Secretary	Derek Pollard

Five nominations were received for the four vacancies for ordinary members on the Committee. Accordingly an election will be held, and you will receive details shortly. The nominations are:

John Frewen-Lord
Phil Hall (current member)
Keith Hodgkin
Chris Keenan (current member)
Martin Ward (current member)

AGM and Annual Conference

This year's AGM will be held on Saturday 14 July 2007 at the University of London Union, Malet Street, London, WC1 7HY commencing at 10:00. The Agenda of the meeting and the Annual Report will be distributed nearer the date.

If you wish to raise any matter at the AGM, the last date for notifying the Secretary of this is 4 July.

The AGM will be followed by the Annual Conference. The outline programme includes the visiting speaker, and also consideration of issues relating to the Units of Measurement Directive and to road signage. However, the Committee welcomes suggestions from members for topics for discussion – please e-mail your ideas to Robin, chair@metric.org.uk, or Derek, secretary@metric.org.uk.



Our visiting speaker is Pat Naughtin. Pat saw through the metric change in Australia, where he now lives, and is the editor of a free online monthly newsletter, 'Metrication matters'. (You can subscribe at <http://www.metricationmatters.com/newsletter>). He is also editor of the 'Numbers and measurement' section of the Australian Government Publishing Service 'Style manual – for writers, editors and printers'.

The title of his talk will be:

Metrication in Australia — what we did *right*.

This talk will include as a theme the question: '*How can people in the UK profit from the Australian metrication experience?*'

This broadly based talk will be about the successful metrication strategies used in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa across many trades, crafts, and professions. Pat will also refer to, and comment on, the metrication programs of the UK and the USA.

Our patron, Lord Howe, has indicated that that he expects to be in London on the week-end of the Conference and may be able to put in an appearance.

In past years, the Conference has concluded at about 16:00.

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"Supplementary indications" – where next?

Following, the publication of the responses received on its consultation on revising the Units of Measurement Directive, the European Commission has made clear that it will be publishing a further report in due course on the outcome of its consultation.

Many of the submissions made by individual members of UKMA were exceptionally well argued. They deserve to be heeded by the Commission, which must now be aware that there is a strong body of informed opinion in the UK that wants an end to the muddle of supplementary indications, and completion of the metric changeover.

When the Commission publishes its proposals, the debate will move to the political arena. The British Government (not to mention US interests) has said that it supports

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the continued use of supplementary indications. So it will be important to lobby politicians and key influential organisations to ensure they are well briefed on the real issues.

There is also concern that those who support supplementary indications, who appear now to have stopped the clock, may now wish to turn it back. But to when? 2000? 1995? 1965? 1897? 1215!

One of our members, Tony Wilson, makes a suggestion for action in the mean time.

“Can we somehow collate all these forum comments (i.e. the comments attached to newspaper columns and the BBC 24 web site)?

I think it would be very useful to analyse these responses to:

- a) Find out what percentage, over a large sample, are pro- or anti- metric. It's obviously not too scientific, being based on self-selection and moderation, but better than nothing;
- b) Log the issues people are raising. This may help our strategy going forward - what are people's fears? Misunderstandings? What arguments in favour are the non-partisan writers raising? Where could education undermine the opposition?”

Any volunteers? Please contact secretary@metric.org.uk

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UKMA blog winning visitors - but more articles are needed

UKMA's blog, "Metric Views", has more than doubled its readership since its launch in December.

Statistics from Webalizer, which monitors traffic on the blog, indicate that the daily average traffic grew by about 50% between December and January, and after some levelling off in February, has continued to grow steadily. The raw data in the table below are difficult to interpret, as the definitions are not clear, and many of the hits, etc. are technical (e.g. generated by search engines), but nevertheless the overall trend is clear.

<i>Month</i>	<i>Daily averages</i>			
	<i>Hits</i>	<i>Files</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Visits</i>
May 2007	984	842	499	267
April	887	722	476	248
March	636	521	372	186
February	531	420	297	157
January	502	367	265	116
December 2006	378	216	160	34

If interest is to be sustained, there is a need for a regular supply of fresh articles. These can be topical (e.g. weather forecast blunder due to incorrect conversion) or more general interest (e.g. metres/km on traffic signs). So members are requested to send draft articles to any Committee member or to blogteam@metricviews.org.uk. (There is no need to worry about confidentiality issues, as the blog team will edit as necessary).

Metric signs (a long way) ahead.

The hostility of the Department for Transport (DfT) towards metrication of road signage is well known and of long standing, surviving twelve governments. For many years, the presence of a majority of imperial-educated drivers was given as a reason for resisting the change, notwithstanding experience to the contrary in many Commonwealth countries. In recent years, this majority has disappeared, and cost has become the main objection. It is for this reason that this topic was covered thoroughly in the UKMA report "Metric signs ahead", published in February 2006. The DfT produced at that time an estimate of the cost that was many times higher than that calculated by UKMA.

So where do we go from here?

- One of our members, John Frewen-Lord, asked his MP, Edward Leigh, to approach the Minister, and received a reply dated 28 March 2007 from Gillian Merron, Minister for Local Transport. After noting that the Government had responded to the European Commission consultation (see page 1) by making clear that its view is that the current arrangements for non-metric traffic signs should remain, the Minister went on to say: "It is estimated that the cost to central and local Government of converting road traffic signs would be in the region of £700 million. We do not believe that diverting this level of funding from higher priority areas ... is justified." So no change there.
- Roddy Urquhart approached his MP, Sir George Young, suggesting that the National Audit Office (NAO) be invited to check the DfT figures. Sir George took up the task energetically, but his energy was not reflected at the NAO, and this initiative led nowhere.
- Unbeknown to the Committee, a retired highways engineer with over 30 years experience has spent the past year preparing his own independent estimate of the cost of the changeover. He presented his findings to UKMA recently, and it is clear that his figures are a fraction of those of the DfT.
- Other information for small scale schemes has been obtained by members, and confirms the inflated nature of the DfT estimate.

Once UKMA has a base of reliable information about cost, we can set about refuting the DfT estimates. This may, for example, help reassure those who see the logic of conversion, perhaps for reasons of safety, but are concerned about cost. And it may help to head off Sir Humphrey's delaying tactics when the political will emerges for making the changeover.

In view of the continuing interest in this topic, the Committee has agreed to a reprint of "Metric signs ahead". The price to members is £6.25, plus £2.50 p&p. You can order through the web site, or by e-mailing Robin, chair@metric.org.uk. If you would prefer an electronic copy at a reduced price, please let Robin know – this option is currently not available, but if there is any interest, the Committee would be willing to consider the idea.

Leyland National bus farewell



We feature an article, exclusive to UKMA News, about the development of the Leyland National metric bus, and its lack of success in export markets. It is a reminder, if one is needed, that life can be more complicated if you try to use two systems of measurement than if you use one. It includes hitherto unpublished information, and was researched and written by Michael Knowles, who has a lifetime of experience in fields related to this subject.

The illustration shows a Leyland National bus at Walsall on 28 April 2007

e-readers should click on the link below for the article (4KB). Other readers should turn to page 8.

http://www.stefenfreund.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Leyland_Farewell-final.pdf

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Legible London

Members of the Google Group may remember Tony Wilson's post in March. He wrote:

'Legible London is a project to provide a new framework for pedestrian signage across central London. To use their own words:

"London is one of the most fascinating cities in the world to explore on foot, but navigating around it can be confusing. Legible London ... seeks to change all this. Its aim is to create a common wayfinding system for London to encourage more walking and to improve pedestrian navigation throughout the city."

This includes a standardisation of the form of distance used; they are proposing to use 'minutes' walk'. This is a step up from yards and miles but I would prefer metres. ... either would technically need DfT approval'

More information about the project can be found on the Legible London web site:

<http://www.legiblelondon.info>

At the Committee's request, Martin Ward drafted a response on behalf of UKMA, recommending that metres should be used for all distances. A copy of this response is available to members from secretary@metric.org.uk.

* * *

New members

We welcome the following new members:

Alex Bailey, David Brown and Neil Trickett.