



UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association
For a *single rational* system of measurement

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Happy New Year to all UKMA newsletter readers



For this New Year edition of the UKMA newsletter there is news of the presentation of a Consumer Rights amendment by Lord Taverne and an update on the Traffic Signs legislation including the proposal to devolve these matters for Scotland to the Scottish parliament.

Metric measures in rounded numbers are appearing more and more on our supermarket shelves – see examples on page 5. However, there is still some way to go. Let's see all milk sold only by the litre in 2015 rather than by the confusing mixture of pints and litres as at present.

Keep up to date at <http://www.metric.org.uk/> and <http://metricviews.org.uk/>.

We hope all UKMA newsletter readers have enjoyed a very merry Christmas and we wish them all a happy New Year.

New Year message from the Chairman of UKMA

...and then three came along together

Everybody knows the story about waiting ages for a bus and, after half an hour, concluding that the drivers must be on strike - whereupon three buses come along together in convoy. It has

recently been a bit like that with progress toward completing metrication.

For several years, and with an increasing sense of frustration, we have seen setback after setback. A Government Minister discourages Trading Standards Authorities from enforcing the law on weights and measures, the EU agrees to permit "supplementary indications" indefinitely, the Department for Transport (DfT) abandons plans to require dual unit signing of low bridges, the Consumers' Association refuses to support our campaign to enable consumers to compare prices on a fair basis, then another Minister threatens to expand the use of imperial measures in the school curriculum.

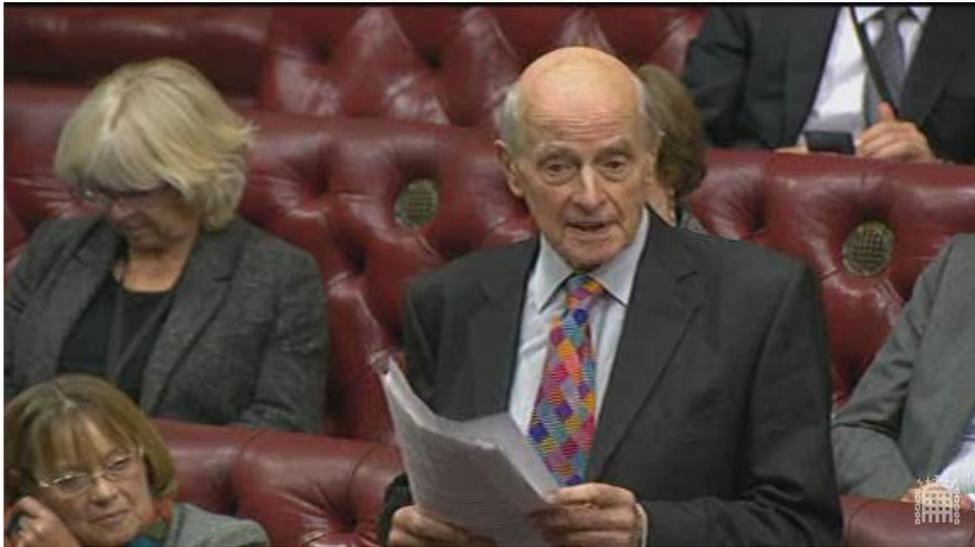
However, as described in more detail elsewhere in this newsletter, 20 days in November saw no less than three small but significant steps on the long march toward completion of metrication.

- On 8 November the DfT announced that from next April, the placing of imperial-only vehicle height and width restriction signs on UK roads would no longer be permitted (though existing signs will remain in place until they wear out).
- On 24 November a Government Minister promised in Parliament that her Department would write to industry associations reminding them that the law requires metric units to be used in product descriptions and advertising.
- On 27 November the Smith Commission (on further devolution to Scotland) published its recommendation that speed limits and road signs should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament - opening up the possibility that a future Scottish Government might convert to metric signs independently of the rest of the UK.

In themselves these small steps do not amount to a revolution, and it remains to be seen what practical effect they will have. But they demonstrate that progress is possible, that we should not be discouraged by occasional setbacks, and that we shall win in the end.

So may I wish UKMA members and supporters the compliments of the season and good luck with campaigning in 2015.

‘Metric Lords’ review the Consumer Rights Bill



Lord Taverne presenting UKMA Chaiman's proposal for the Consumer Rights Bill.

A Government Minister has promised to advise industry bodies that the law requires the use of metric units in all product description and advertising.

In what could be a significant step in the progress toward completing metrication in the UK, Baroness Jolly, the Minister responsible in the House of Lords for consumer affairs, undertook to consult with “relevant industry bodies to remind them of the current legal position and the importance of providing clarity for consumers.”

The Minister was responding to Lord Taverne's amendment to the Consumer Rights Bill at its Report stage on 24 November. This amendment would have made it explicit that the law requires the use of metric units for all product description and advertising – even if those units are not “in use for trade”. Lord Taverne had drawn attention to the explanation of a previous Minister (David Willetts, MP) that the Weights and Measures Act only applies when goods and services are being sold by reference to quantity, and that the Act does not apply to mere descriptions. This statement by Mr Willetts was consistent with similar advice invariably given by Trading Standards Officers throughout the UK. As a result of this (now apparently erroneous) advice, consumers are faced with a mixture of litres and cubic feet in stating the capacity of fridges and a muddle of metres, feet and inches in property advertisements.

What Baroness Jolly has pointed out is, firstly, that the Act does apply to advertisements if they relate to goods and services that are being sold “by reference to quantity”, and, secondly, that the separate Units of Measurement Regulations provide that metric units are the legal unit for any purposes beyond “use for trade”. Therefore, she concluded, Lord Taverne's amendment was unnecessary since the law already covered the situations that he had described, and so she asked him to withdraw his amendment.

In agreeing to withdraw, Lord Taverne commented: “If the Government do in fact live up to their promise and ensure that the professions and those responsible for enforcement tell people exactly what the law is, which is that it requires that metric units should take priority even in advertisements and descriptions, that will meet my objections.”

An interesting contribution to the debate came from Lord Deben (formerly John Gummer), who was a Cabinet Minister in the Thatcher and Major Governments. His support is indicative that despite the noise made by populist opponents of metrication, there is considerable unspoken sympathy in high places for completing the process – now lasting almost 50 years since it was announced to the British Parliament – not to mention 800 years since Magna Carta.

We now await the details of the Government's advice to the industry. In time this should see an end to consumers having to compare central heating boilers in kilowatts and “British thermal units” (per hour) and relate carpets measured in square metres to room sizes in square feet.



Lord Deben (formerly John Gummer), supporting Lord Taverne's amendment.

Traffic signs and speed limits to be devolved to Scotland

The Smith Commission on further devolution to Scotland has recommended that speed limits and traffic signs should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

On 27 November the Commission on further devolution to Scotland (known as the "Smith Commission" after its Chairman, Lord Smith) published the unanimous report of its 11 members (two from each main Scottish political party, plus Lord Smith).

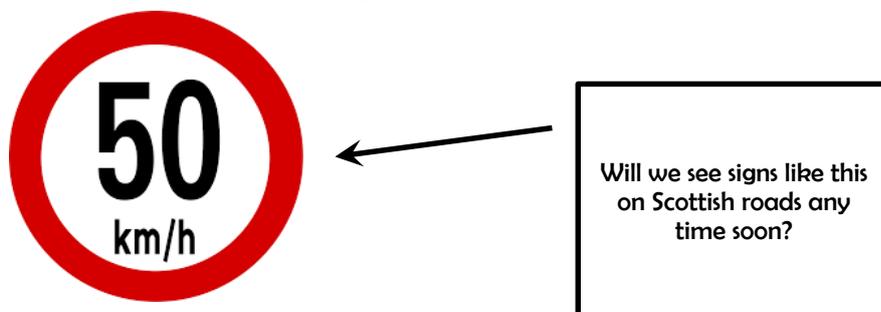
Most attention has been focused on the Commission's recommendations on devolving income tax and some welfare benefits, but paragraph 66 of the Report states:

"Remaining powers to change speed limits will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Powers over all road traffic signs in Scotland will also be devolved."

Assuming that these recommendations are implemented in full, this should mean that a future Scottish Government could decide to convert traffic signs and speed limits to metres, kilometres and km/h even if the rest of the UK clings to obsolete imperial measures. This is much as recommended by the UK Metric Association in its submission to the Smith Commission.

However, the Report makes no specific mention of Weights and Measures powers generally – although paragraph 72 recommends that "Consumer advocacy and advice will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament."

A slight doubt therefore remains over the power to convert speed limits and traffic signs. It has been found in the past that although the Northern Ireland devolved Government has control over traffic signs, legal advice has been obtained that Weights and Measures law trumps traffic signs, and therefore the NI Assembly cannot match its southern neighbour and convert to km/h speed limits without UK consent. That said, and given the current mood of Scottish voters, it is inconceivable that a future UK Government would dare to veto a Scottish decision to modernise its road signs.



Minor success for UKMA – imperial-only height and width signs to be discontinued

Posted on MetricViews at 2014-11-09 by Erithacus

The Department for Transport (DfT) has announced a tiny but significant piece of progress on the long road to completing metrication in the UK.

On Saturday 8 November the DfT published its response to the consultation on revisions to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions due to come into force in 2015. This was much as predicted since it broadly followed consultations with the industry over the previous year. However, a major surprise is that Ministers have finally agreed that the time has come to phase out imperial-only signs for vehicle height and width restrictions. Consequently, from April 2015 any new or replacement signs will have to show both metric and imperial units.

UKMA had strongly argued for this change and claims at least some of the credit for this minor success.

The background is that dual unit signs have been available since the early 1990s (at least), and the DfT has strongly recommended their use in preference to the imperial-only versions – but has always shied away from making them mandatory. As a result backward highway authorities have continued to install new imperial-only signs.

In 2009 the previous Government proposed to make the replacement of such signs with the dual version a requirement within four years, and this received broad support within the industry. At the time they produced cost/benefit estimates showing a £2 million benefit over 10 years. However, the incoming Government cancelled the proposal, declaring it to be a waste of money.

The TSRGD was due for revision in 2015, and following informal consultations, the DfT launched a public consultation, declaring that measurement units were “out of scope.” Nevertheless, UKMA in its submission argued that the deletion of the imperial-only height and width signs should be “in scope” since, the dual unit signs already existed, and there was no change in the units themselves. UKMA also lobbied other stakeholders, and it appears that this campaign has borne fruit. UKMA’s submission can be read at <http://www.ukma.org.uk/sites/default/files/ukma-consultation-response-tsrgd2015-2014-05.pdf>.

The DfT has now produced its response to this consultation (see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/371570/response.pdf).

At the very end, almost as a throwaway afterthought, the document concludes:

“Other issues

14.1 In order to improve road safety and compliance, ministers have decided that the revised TSRGD will no longer prescribe imperial-only height and width limit signs. Imperial only signs can remain in place only until such time that they become life-expired, or replaced during routine maintenance, at which time the dual-unit equivalent must be used.”

Of course, the devil will be in the detail, and we shall have to see exactly how this is implemented. Particularly important will be temporary width restriction signs at road works and contraflows, where it is imperative the Continental HGV drivers are aware that they are banned from the narrow lanes. The Highways Agency has hitherto ignored the DfT advice to use dual unit signs and one frequently still sees imperial-only signs – even on major roads to and from ferry ports.

Nevertheless, it would be churlish not to compliment the DfT on finally agreeing to the inevitable. Perhaps the next Government will take the obvious further step of setting a time limit for the remaining imperial-only signs to be replaced.

This is how the Daily Telegraph reported this news:

Metric measurements to be used on road signs for first time.

By Claire Duffin 10:45AM GMT 08 Nov 2014

In a move which will anger traditionalists, signs showing height and width restrictions will start to carry measurements in both feet and inches and metres and centimetres. The new-style signs will be introduced as old ones are replaced as part of plans to modernise the road network.

The days of imperial measurements on our roads could be numbered.

But motoring organisations have warned they could lead to confusion. Critics have also expressed concern it could lead to kilometres per hour being introduced on speed signs.



New road signs using both imperial and metric measurements are to be introduced under Government plans.

Luke Bosdet, a spokesman for the AA, said: "Motorists and hauliers have got used to seeing signs in feet and inches. In fast moving traffic if they glance up and read the metric metres first, there could be a problem."

The plans follow consultation by the Government on its Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD), which it says is out of date and in need of an overhaul.

In a report, the Department of Transport states: "In order to improve road safety and compliance, ministers have decided that the revised TSRGD will no longer prescribe imperial-only height and width limit signs.

"Imperial only signs can remain in place only until such time that they become life-expired, or replaced during routine maintenance, at which time the dual-unit equivalent must be used."

A Department for Transport spokesman said: "Displaying dual measures of height and width restrictions make it easier for drivers and are designed to help improve safety on our roads. There are no plans to duplicate any other type of traffic sign."

Metric Christmas?

Sad ☹️

6ft Alaska Christmas Tree



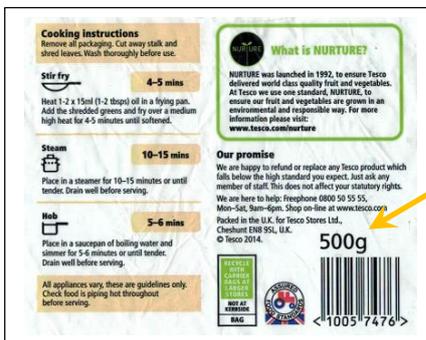
Why 6ft

Why do we have to put up with this?

Homebase Product details include:

- Type: Artificial tree
- Colour: Green.
- Height: 6ft.
- Height: Approx. 180cm.

Much better 😊



Note: no 454 g nonsense!

And finally:

