



PRIME MINISTER

REPORT ON DIET AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE BY THE COMMITTEE ON
MEDICAL ASPECTS OF FOOD POLICY (COMA)

You will have seen the reports in The Sunday Times and in yesterday's Guardian that the Government is suppressing or censoring nutritional advice produced by an independent body, under pressure from food and agriculture lobbies.

The facts are as follows:

- Last year the Government accepted and endorsed a report by COMA that recommended reducing the intake of saturated fat in order to reduce coronary heart disease.
- I commissioned the Health Education Council (HEC) and British Nutrition Foundation (BNF), together with their Joint Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education (JACNE), to convert the COMA scientific recommendations into practical dietary guidance for the general public. This guidance is now with me.
- Two small points on the text are in dispute (see Annex). On butter, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I agree that it is worded more strongly than the COMA report requires, and the author of the COMA report (Sir Philip Randle) shares our view. On cooking, Sir Philip Randle and the Chief Medical Officer consider the JACNE text acceptable: I accept their advice; the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food does not.

I have no powers to stop copies of the JACNE booklet being given to the Press. I have certainly no powers to prevent the BNF from publishing it independently. And I understand the BNF will release

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a Press Notice tomorrow, Wednesday, expressing concern at the delay and that they propose to issue the text of the booklet to the press on Friday if there is no firm indication from us that we will publish. I would have formally to direct the HEC not to publish if I wished to stop them.

We have already negotiated a number of changes with JACNE. I see no prospect of further changes now being agreed. In my judgement we make ourselves look foolish by continuing to convey an impression of suppression - particularly since I have neither the power nor the desire to do so. The Government cannot be seen to be divided on this.

There is everything to be said in my view for having the booklet published in an objective way, albeit with some qualification on our part. Our line would then be that the Government welcomes the booklet as helping to show how each of us can choose our own way to cut back on saturated fats; that there are some points which the Government cannot endorse because they go slightly beyond the COMA recommendations; but that the Government expects that people will apply the advice in a commonsense way. Michael Jopling does not agree and, for this reason, I am referring the matter to you since I believe we have no real alternative but to agree that HEC and BNF proceed to publish the booklet with comment from the Government as set out above.

Kenneth Clarke would be available for any meeting on this.

I am copying this minute to Michael Jopling, George Younger, Nicholas Edwards and Douglas Hurd.

Elizabeth Matherell

6 August 1985

for N F

(Approved by the Secretary of State)

JACNE GUIDANCE: POINTS IN DISPUTE

BUTTER

JACNE draft: "Butter has a lot of saturated fat. If you do not want to do without butter completely, why not have an alternative handy so that you are not using butter all the time."

Government proposal: "Butter has a lot of saturated fat. You will find it easier to reduce the amount of butter you eat by having an alternative handy."

COOKING

JACNE draft: "Try using less meat - add more beans and vegetables."

Government proposal: Omit above sentence.

