

Prime Minister



In the light of this advice are you willing to sign the attached letter to Donald Stewart?

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

W Rickett Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AL

Willie. This is a load of rubbish. The request is reasonable - especially if it would help Scotland out. On that 22/10

22 October 1982

Dear Willie,

You wrote to me on 20 October recording the Prime Minister's comments on the Economic Secretary's draft reply to Mr Donald Stewart's letter of 5 October about Customs facilities at Wick Airport.

There is indeed an adjacent Customs & Excise office at Wick itself, albeit a small one. This is responsible for the collection and control of VAT and Customs & Excise duties throughout the counties of Caithness and Sutherland, an area roughly equivalent in size to the counties of Essex and Hertfordshire (but with of course much less developed communications).

As we understand it, the service which Air Ecosse wish to operate would touch down twice a week at Wick airfield at noon on the outward flight and at 3.00 pm. on the return flight. Given the notorious unpredictability of weather at Wick and the Faeroes, an Officer providing Customs cover would have to ensure that his work schedule left him clear for most of the middle and latter part of the day on the two days in question. In effect the Officer would be regularly pinned down in the Wick area and would be unavailable to undertake any duties which might require him to move any distance away, eg to visit distilleries and VAT traders. It would therefore be impossible for local management to plan the deployment of the Officer's time in any orderly fashion or with any certainty that he could adhere to any schedule of visits or other duties.

It is also important to bear in mind that the level of passenger utilisation of such a service would be very uncertain. On many occasions there might well be no more than two or three passengers at most, and indeed on some occasions there might be no passengers at all. With a scheduled service it is always open for passengers to join an aircraft up to a few minutes before departure and there could be no adequate advance notice on whether or not passengers were to be carried.

However, as the Economic Secretary has made clear in earlier

correspondence, none of these is the crucial consideration. The crucial consideration is the knock-on effect of a concession at Wick on other claimant airports which have a far better case than Wick.

For these reasons, the Economic Secretary recommends that the Prime Minister should write to Mr Stewart along the lines of the draft originally submitted.

yours sincerely,

Chris

C D HARRISON
Private Secretary



FILE SW
Govt. Mach.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 October, 1982

Thank you for your letter of 19 October, with which you enclosed a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Mr. Donald Stewart's letter of 5 October about Customs facilities at Wick Airport.

The gist of the second paragraph of this draft was that Customs officers from nearby airfields could not provide an ad hoc service at Wick because they should be fully occupied with their own tasks. The Prime Minister is not convinced by this argument. She has asked whether there is indeed another Customs office close to Wick Airport, and I think it would also be useful if you could let us have more details about the demands it would make on a Customs officer's time to provide an ad hoc service at Wick.

~~1/25~~
I should be grateful if you could let me have advice on this point, and if necessary a revised draft reply, by Friday, 22 October, if at all possible.

W. F. S. RICKETT

C. D. Harrison, Esq.,
H. M. Treasury

de



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

ls there another office
done ahead?
not

Thank you for your further letter of 5 October about the provision of Customs facilities at Wick airport. I was glad to see that you acknowledge the problems which we would have in providing Customs facilities on demand. But sadly I am afraid your suggestion that a Customs officer from an office close at hand might be seconded to deal with infrequent scheduled services does not really offer a solution to the problem.

One of the underlying aims of our policy of reducing the size of the public service is our wish to see that the remaining staff works with maximum efficiency. Customs officers employed in other offices should therefore be fully occupied with the tasks appropriate to those offices. If they had to absent themselves from their normal duties on a regular basis, those duties would be bound to suffer.

Moreover air services involving small aircraft and small airports such as Wick are frequently affected by bad weather. Delays in departure and arrival typically associated with such traffic would inevitably create uncertainty as to the length and timing of commitment on the part of the Customs officer.

/I do

I do understand your concern and am only sorry to be unable to find an acceptable way of reaching it.

The Rt. Hon. D. J. Stewart, M.P.



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

W Rickett Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1

Dear Willie, *myre*
WH
19/10 19 October 1982

WICK AIRFIELD

As requested in your letter to me of 8 October, I attach a draft reply to the letter of 5 October from Mr Donald Stewart MP about the provision of Customs facilities at Wick airfield.

Yours sincerely,

Chris

C D HARRISON
Private Secretary

DRAFT REPLY FROM PRIME MINISTER
TO RT HON DONALD STEWART MP

Thank you for your further letter of 5 October about the provision of Customs facilities at Wick airport. I was glad to see that you acknowledge the problems which we would have in providing Customs facilities on demand. But sadly I am afraid your suggestion that a Customs officer from an office close at hand might be seconded to deal with infrequent scheduled services does not really offer a solution to the problem.

One of the underlying aims of our policy of reducing the size of the public service is our wish to see that the remaining staff works with maximum efficiency. Customs officers employed in other offices should therefore be fully occupied with the tasks appropriate to those offices. If they had to absent themselves from their normal duties on a regular basis, those duties would be bound to suffer.

Moreover air services involving small aircraft and small airports such as Wick are frequently affected by adverse weather conditions. Delays in departure and arrival typically associated with such traffic would inevitably create uncertainty as to the length and timing of commitment on the part of the Customs officer.

I do understand your concern and am only sorry to be unable to find an acceptable way of reaching it.

Govt Mech. Apr 82, Mich. Airfield,

Govt Mach
HL

8 October 1982

I enclose a copy of a further letter from Mr. Donald Stewart, M.P. about the provision of customs facilities at Wick airfield.

I should be grateful if you could let me have a draft reply for the Prime Minister's signature by Wednesday 20 October.

WILLIAM RICKETT

C.D. Harrison, Esq.,
H.M. Treasury.

8 October 1982

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to acknowledge your letter of 5 October about the provision of customs facilities at Wick airfield.

I will place your letter before the Prime Minister and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

WILLIAM RICKETT

The Rt. Hon. Donald Stewart, M.P.

From: The Rt. Hon. Donald Stewart, M.P.



5 October 1982

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
LONDON. S.W.1

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 9 September about the provision of customs facilities at Wick airfield.

I accept that there are substantial reasons why an open-door policy is not feasible for all airfields and I take your point regarding supervision of immigration, control of human and animal diseases and drugs.

I note that this system is widely followed elsewhere. Perhaps the solution would be that on the days of flying a regular service, a Customs officer could be seconded from another office close at hand. (But I do not wish to prolong the correspondence which you have been kind enough to enter in on this question!)

*Yours sincerely,
Donald Stewart*

Donald Stewart

cc 16
cf pps?

27

