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PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE RIGHT HON MERLYN REES MP TO
DR GARETT FITZGERALD TD

When we met on 19 December 1974 you mentioned cross-border studies. I had not brought myself up-to-date on this subject and I said I would look into it.

You referred to agreements reached with the British Government in 1973 for extensive regional studies along the length of the border. As you know, however, that agreement which was in principle only was made in very different circumstances and has been overtaken by subsequent events. When the Northern Ireland Executive was consulted I am aware that Mr Faulkner expressed the view to the Taoiseach that it would be better to avoid a wide-ranging study covering a considerable geographical area and a comprehensive range of topics, and to concentrate instead on specific study areas of likely practical utility. This is a view which I share.

During the latter part of the meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister on 1 November, I said that the British Government did not object to a proposal for cross-border studies but thought it wiser if the scheme could be confined to a relatively small area in the beginning, to avoid arousing fears in the Protestant community. I also stressed that the timing of any announcement would have to be considered by the British Government with care.

The subject was raised again at the informal meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister on 21 November, and the Prime Minister then said that if it were possible to look at a cross-border

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study and take it out of a political context that would be welcome to the British Government.

Our view has been consistently that if we are to avoid stirring up political difficulties any cross-border studies must be small and severely practical. This is especially important at the present time when the Protestants are watchful for any indication of a "sell-out" by our Government: and the timing of any public announcement on this should be carefully considered by both of us.

The general regional planning study which you seem to have in mind would comprise the whole of Donegal, the whole of Derry, and possibly part of Tyrone. Such a study would certainly not meet our essential conditions. Even if one defines a much smaller area one is still raising the question as to whether the competent Planning Authorities who have been responsible for preparing regional plans need have their work done over by a consultant. It would be more productive to ensure that those responsible for planning liaise more closely together. Co-operation in this way would in the long run be much more fruitful than co-operation imposed through the medium of a report from an outside consultant.

However, because we were very conscious of your wish for some direct evidence of cross-border co-operation under EEC auspices we have sought practical projects capable of implementation now. Both of the projects which have so far been mentioned - the development of the Port of Londonderry in relation to its hinterland, and the Fishery project - fall within this category. My judgement that these two studies are practical and realistic is reinforced by the

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knowledge that when your officials together with officials from the Northern Ireland Departments were considering possible Council of Ireland functions early in 1974, conservation of fish stocks and Foyle Harbour development were two of the issues then identified as suitable for future co-operation between North and South. I hope therefore that you can now agree that we should proceed as I have suggested.

Denny?

23 January 1975

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