

METRICATION

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Members will recall that when the Weights and Measures Act was debated in the House last year I indicated that I would bring before the House plans for the orderly and gradual conversion from the imperial system to the metric system of weights and measures, and I now do so.

2. It is perhaps of interest to note that a report submitted to the United Kingdom government in 1948 recommended that currency should be decimalised before the adoption of the metric system of weights and measures. Jamaica successfully completed this first step in 1969.

3. The subject of Metrication has been under consideration since 1972 when the Government set up a Working Group representative of the various sectors of the economy to examine and made recommendations on the major implications of a change to the metric system of weights and measures. As a result of the acceptance of recommendations in the Report of the Working Group the Government's decision to change to the metric International System (SI) was announced in the Throne Speech of April 1973.

4. One of the first steps taken to give effect to this decision was the enactment last year of the Weights and Measures legislation which, inter alia, made it legal for the metric system as well as the imperial system to be used for commercial purposes in Jamaica.

5. During 1976 also the Government was fortunate in obtaining the services of an adviser on Metrication from New Zealand which had recently made the change to Metric Units. The adviser, after an initial survey, gave valuable advice on the preparation of a practical programme of conversion to the metric system involving all sectors of the community, and on the techniques required in carrying out the programme effectively.

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6. As Honourable members realise the trend towards the use of the metric system is world wide. There are now very few countries which have not changed or have not indicated their intention to change to the metric system. Canada and the U.S.A. are now in the process of changing while the ECM and Latin American countries have changed to the metric system. In our CARICOM area, the Council of Ministers agreed some time ago that metrication should proceed on a regional basis and, as Members are no doubt aware, the metrication of our Common External Tariff statistical data came into effect on the 1st of January, 1977.

7. Despite our present economic constraints therefore, Jamaica must now take another step towards metrication so as not to be at a disadvantage in its trading relationships with the rest of the world. In fact, making the change now will increase the benefits to be derived from natural reconstruction.

8. Accordingly, I have to inform this Honourable House that a Metrication Advisory Board has been appointed to be responsible for planning, promoting and supervising the change to the metric system.

The Metrication Board and its committees will consist of representatives of those sectors and interests which will be most directly affected by the change and these representations will develop plans for the changeover in each of the main sectors of the economy.

The Sectors to be represented on the Board are:

Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries

Mineral Extraction and Geological Surveys

Building and Engineering Construction

Education, Science and Technology

Fuel, Power, Transport, Communications

Manufacturing and Processing

Central and Local Government

Standardisation

Consumers, Public Information and Retailing

The Trade unions will be represented on this Board.

The representatives of these sectors on the Board will each be a Chairman of a Sector Committee which will do the detailed work of collecting information and preparing programmes and time tables to be approved and co-ordinated by the Board.

9. It is the intention of the Government that costs incurred in changing will lie where they fall, that is, each firm or organization will bear its own cost of changing to the metric system. It is emphasised however that the plans for the change will be drawn up in a practical manner by those who are most closely connected with each activity, regard being paid to the costs involved, and to ensure that such costs will be held to the very minimum.

10. I must also emphasise that the change in the system of weights and measures will not be to the disadvantage of the consumer. In ensuring that this is so, it will be a prime function of the Board and of my Ministry to see that consumer education and protection are satisfactorily carried out throughout the metrication exercise and that proper safeguards are instituted in the interests of the consumer.

11. It should be noted too that the change to metric units cannot be made in a single day, as was the case with the change to decimal currency. The metric change has to be co-ordinated and progressive and a programme will be planned to meet the requirements of different sectors of the economy. Based on the experience of other countries, it is hoped that the change to the metric system can be completed in another **three** to four years.

12. In the meantime persons planning new commercial or business ventures, such as the purchase of new plant and equipment, should establish that they are capable of producing metric products without adaptation and that all calibrations and instruments are in SI Units. Some units used in established metric countries differ from SI units, and if there is any

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doubt, intending purchasers of equipment should check with the Metrication Director whose office is at the Bureau of Standards.

13. I invite the support and co-operation of all members of Parliament and of the general public in this national programme so as to ensure the orderly and successful change to the metric (SI) system of weights and measures.

Ministry of Industry and Commerce
9th March, 1977

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