



Trading Standards Institute accused of Metric “Cop Out”

THE Trading Standards Institute (TSI) - whose members are responsible for enforcing weights and measures law - has declined to support UKMA's campaign for a single, rational system of measurement that everybody understands and uses for all purposes. In response, UKMA has accused the TSI of “an abdication of professional responsibility”.

In a letter to UKMA Chairman, Robin Paice, the institute's Chief Executive, Ron Gainsford, wrote “that TSI continues to hold a neutral position on the matter of metric and imperial units of measurement.” The background to the correspondence is that, as part of the consultation on reviewing Weights and Measures legislation, UKMA invited the TSI to support its submission to the National Weights and Measures Laboratory.

Mr Gainsford wrote: “I am sure the Association will continue to understand that our members bear the responsibility of regulating the marketplace in the impartial manner expected of bona fide professionals.

“As their Institute we remain appropriately sensitive to that imperative”.

This brought a strongly-worded reply from UKMA. Robin Paice replied: “The Law Society is not reticent in expressing views and lobbying the Government on changes in the law (e.g. on legal aid). The Association of Chief Police Officers is not slow to comment on problems impinging on law enforcement (e.g. licensing laws). The Royal Town Planning Institute ... expresses forthright views on proposed changes to the planning regime. Yet

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Market Trader charged in scales row opts for Jury trial

WHILE the Trading Standards Institute opts to take a hands-off approach to the metrication issue, many of their members continue to face problems when trying to enforce Weights and Measures legislation.

A market trader charged with breaking a number of such laws has elected to take her case before a jury. The stallholder at a market in Hackney, in London's East End, faces a number of charges including weighing produce only in Pounds and Ounces.

Trading Standards Officers (TSOs) had seized weighing scales from her stall after she'd allegedly ignored previous warnings from the authorities to adhere to the law. The stallholder pleaded Not Guilty to the charges and in an unusual move in this kind of case, the defendant opted for trial by jury. The case is expected to be heard in late spring or early summer.

Meanwhile UKMA issued a press release advising the public against buying produce from traders using illegal scales. It said: “Imperial-only scales have not been checked by Trading Standards Officers for over eight years, and it is quite possible that they are no longer accurate. There is therefore a significant chance that when you buy from a shop or market stall that uses illegal scales you will get less than you are paying for”.

solicitors, police officers and town planners have no difficulty in carrying out their duties impartially even if they personally may disagree with the law. There is obviously no contradiction between an Institute expressing a professional view on a policy issue and its members carrying out the law in an impartial manner. So why is the Trading Standards Institute different?

He continued: "In your letter you talk of "neutrality" - but how can you be "neutral" as between the present dysfunctional and difficult-to-enforce muddle (which must cause considerable problems for your members) and the simplicity and clarity of a single system? Indeed it was [a member of your Council] himself who coined the expression "Every country needs a system of measurement. Nobody needs two systems."

"It is a tragedy for this country that the Institute that could speak with unrivalled authority on the metrication issue appears to lack the courage to do so. I showed your letter to a colleague, who described it as "a complete cop out". It might be more accurate to describe it as an abdication of professional responsibility.

"Perhaps you could ask your Council to look at the matter again".



"An abdication of professional responsibility"

Mr Gainsford replied saying he would advise UKMA of any change in the institute's position.

UKMA hopes that the TSI Council will indeed reconsider its position and that it will have the courage to add its weight to the campaign to end the "two systems" measurement muddle in the UK. If it is not prepared to do so, perhaps their spokesperson could explain why the TSI is unique amongst professional institutes in not having the courage to express a professional view on an issue that is central to its work.

If you see what you believe to be illegal imperial-only prices at any retailer, please complain to your nearest trading standards office (usually found at your local council). UKMA welcomes copies of any correspondence you may enter into.

Getting the measure of Down Under

Keith Hodgkin



LAST month I found myself in what seemed like an almost parallel universe. Standing on a bridge over the River Avon, I watched visitors punting on the river below. Nearby, schoolchildren wearing blazers and boaters walked past a statue of Queen Victoria. And just a stone's throw away, people were enjoying dinner at the many riverside bistros and bars on Oxford Terrace. But this wasn't Bath or Cambridge, but Christchurch, New Zealand, possibly the furthest city from Britain - some 18,000 km away - yet also one of the most English of cities outside the UK.

When our opponents writhe about the metric system in the same breath as they do about Europe, I think of New Zealand, and its larger neighbour Australia. There's no Brussels Down Under but there are plenty of British places names underlining the historic links between our countries. Yet both Australia and New Zealand successfully embraced the metric system over three decades ago and seemingly haven't looked back since.

One of the interesting things I noticed Down Under is just how completely metric the countries are. I was prepared for kilometres, and kilograms. But trying to work out my waist size when looking at a pair of jeans was more of a shock. The conversion charts are long gone. My mental arithmetic (with a little help from an Aussie friend of mine who used to live in Britain) came to the fore. I now know that I have a 78 cm waist. I've converted. It's not a problem!

However there are signs that globalisation is trying to undermine this metric world. Television manufacturers appear to market TVs with screen dimensions in inches, with retailers usually following by adding "cm"s in brackets. When my friend told his sister that he'd bought a 42 inch TV, her first question was: "How big's 42 inch?"

My feeling is that most Kiwis and Aussies are aware of imperial measures in a way that Brits are aware of other languages. They know a few basics but it's essentially foreign, something that's not used on a day-to-day basis.

Strangely, "foreign" is a word I still find hard to associate with Christchurch. The city is like an England of the past yet with a measurement system of the future.

Project underway to relist the UK's Prominent Peaks in Metric

Jim Bloomer & Roddy Urquhart

HILL walking in Britain has been growing in popularity since the 1980s with increasing leisure time and disposable income. Many walkers save on gym fees and keep a certain level of fitness through their exertions on the hill. The local economy in some of the remoter parts of the UK has been given a real boost through the resultant tourist spend.

Some hillwalkers are content to visit their local or favourite hills but others enjoy visiting new places. Many enjoy the activity for its own sake together with the friendships that develop but many find that their enjoyment is enhanced by having a list of hills against which to monitor their progress.

Sir Hugh Munro came up with the first hill list in 1891. His height criterion was 3000 feet (914 m) and the list was limited to the Scottish Highlands, Skye and Mull. Other lists followed mainly filling gaps left by Munro e.g. England, Wales, Southern Scotland and Scottish summits between 2000-2500 ft and 2500-3000 ft. In addition to a height qualification, most lists incorporate a prominence (or drop or re-ascent on all sides) criteria. Without any prominence criteria the list compiler could go on to detail every stone around the summit of Ben Nevis!

What followed was the development of more lists, using imperial units, for both height and prominence. OS maps adopted the kilometre-based National Grid in 1940 but initially used imperial contours. With the

introduction of 1:50,000 OS metric maps in the early 1970s spot heights were converted to metres and a complete new survey resulted in accurate contours at 10 metre intervals. On hill lists prominence criteria were changed to metres. Conveniently 50 feet (15.2 m) was close to 15 m and so prominence criteria of 50/100/500 feet were exchanged for 15/30/150 m. No changes were made to height criteria and so hillwalkers have to remember 610/762/914 m in relation to their target list; something not easy to follow on an OS map! Furthermore some 914 m summits are Munros and others aren't (Beinn Dearg in Torridon – pronounced 'Ben Jerrag' - is 2999 feet).

The qualification criteria of popular hill lists can be summarised in the table at the bottom of this page.

In 1989 Dr Eric Yeaman introduced the first truly metric list of hills titled 'Handbook of the Scottish Hills'. His prominence criterion was 100 m and he introduced the concept of not having an additional height criterion. As a result his list includes some 21 summits with an altitude between 100 and 104 m. His publication did not reach a wide audience.

In 1992 Alan Dawson produced 'The Relative Hills of Britain' which has gone on to be known as a list of the Marilyns (hillwalkers often claim a sense of humour Monroe = Munro). This listing has gained popularity. Dawson uses 150 m for prominence, again with no height qualification, and applies it to Great Britain and the Isle of Man. The list provides opportunities for those resident in SE England – there's even a Marilyn within 5 km of the sea NW of Folkestone. Whilst (in good weather) Marilyns always provide good view points, their prominence criterion equates to 500 feet

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Existing Hill Lists							
Heights/Prominence in m or m/ft							
Name	Author	Where	Year	Hills	Height (min)	Height (max)	Prominence (min)
Munros	Munro	S=Scotland	1891	284	914/3000ft	-1344	arbitrary
Corbetts	Corbett	S	c.1940	219	762/2500ft	914/2999ft	150/500ft
Grahams	Dawson/Torbet	S	1995	224	610/2000ft	762/2499ft	150
Donalds	Donald	S-Lowlands	1935	140	610/2000ft	-843	30/100ft
Wainwrights	Wainwright	E-Lake District	1955-66	214	-298	-978	arbitrary
Nuttalls	Nuttall	E/W	1989	442	610/2000ft	-1085	15/50ft
Dewey's	Dewey's	E/W	1995	440	500	610/1999ft	30
Hewitts	Dawson	E/W	1997	310	610/2000ft	-1085	30
Marilyns	Dawson	GB/LOM	1992	1555	150	-1344	150
Yeamans	Yeaman	S	1989	2435	100	-1344	100

and the lower summits cannot be considered to qualify as mountains or peaks.

There are a number of fundamental problems with existing lists. Those with feet-based height criteria no longer fit with maps. There is a real need for a new UK peaks list based on metric height and prominence criteria. Jim Bloomer, with lots of support from Roddy Urquhart, is working on a list of 'UK Prominent Peaks'. This, we hope, will result in a new listing which achieves:

- 1 A flagship list of around 150 hills (achievable for the enthusiast).
- 2 The same criteria applied uniformly across the UK.
- 3 Round metric-based choices for qualification criteria (no multiples of 15 m).
- 4 All important hills in the UK tied into a new topographic framework.
- 5 Regional/national challenges in addition to the flagship UK list (carbon footprint reduction).



This work should be available later this year, freely available to all, via the UKMA website. This should include downloadable resources and maps.

Hillwalkers should be a naturally metric-using community, however traditional hillwalking lists and emergency service news reports of mountain accidents have perpetuated the use of feet in parallel with metres. This initiative will help redress this.

...watch this space!

Election of Officers and other Committee members for 2008-9

WOULD you like to get more involved in the work of UKMA? If so, here is your opportunity.

Nominations for Officers and other members of UKMA's Committee for the year 2008-9 will open on 1 May and close on 11 May 2008. If there's a contest, papers will be distributed on 19 May with the ballot closing on 2 June 2008. The result will then be announced during the AGM on 5 July and the new Committee will take office immediately after that.

Retiring Officers and other Committee members are eligible for re-election.

The Committee comprises Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and **four** other members. Any member may nominate any other member for any position, and nominations should be sent to the Secretary by e-mail to secretary@ukma.org.uk or by post to the Secretary UKMA, 34 Wroxham Gardens, London, N11 2BA.

If you are considering serving on the Committee but are uncertain as to what is involved, please do not hesitate to contact one of the current Officers or Committee members.

Welcome...

UKMA is pleased to welcome the following new members to the association:

Daniel Harris
Richard Little
Russell Partridge

Thanks for your support

*Clear your diary and organise
your travel now!*

**UKMA AGM and
Annual Meeting
Saturday 5 July, in London**

*Full conference details will
follow nearer the time*

First Emperor showed the way - 2000 years ago

Robin Paice

I recently had the pleasure of visiting the splendid (Chinese) First Emperor exhibition at the British Museum. Apart from the terracotta warriors, what impressed me the most was the way that Qin Shihuangdi imposed standardisation on his vast empire - including, of course, weights and measures.

Qin Shihuangdi unified China by conquest in 221 BC. One of his first acts was to decree that only standard weights and measures were to be used throughout the empire. The bronze weight illustrated below is inscribed as follows: "In the 26th year [of his reign the king of Qin] united the princes of the [individual] states; the people enjoyed peace, and he was proclaimed emperor [huangdi]. He issued an edict that all weights are to be standardised. Where they are not uniform, or where there are any doubts, let them be standardised and classified."



(Acknowledgements to the Trustees of the British Museum)

Also of interest is the measuring cup illustrated below. Its capacity is a "half dou", which was the most popular size in use. Strangely enough, it is almost exactly equivalent to one litre. Obviously, this must be sheer coincidence, but it does give the lie to the British imperialists' claim that the pint is "natural", whereas the litre is not.



(Acknowledgements to the Trustees of the British Museum)

Here in Britain the first recorded attempt to standardise weights and measures can be found in Magna Carta (1215), but it was not until 1824 that imperial measures were standardised by the first Weights and Measures Act. Unfortunately, our current crop of politicians lack the perception or the political courage (or both) to acknowledge that a single system of weights and measures is a basic requirement of a modern society. Hence we have, to quote another Chinese leader*, "one country, two systems".

* the late Deng Xiaoping, referring to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Delia finally goes metric

Delia Smith's new book, "How to cheat at cooking", was published in February, and it is ALL METRIC! Not an ounce, pint, cup or Fahrenheit is to be found between the covers of this latest volume, targeted as it is at busy people who like cooking but don't have time for elaborate preparation.

It is 5 years since the doyenne of TV cooks last published, and in the intervening period, Delia (or more probably her publisher) appears to have accepted that imperial conversions of every metric ingredient are no longer necessary or desirable. The only arguably non-metric measures given are teaspoons and tablespoons, but as these are now standardised at 5 ml and 15 ml respectively, this is perhaps forgivable. So, well done, Delia!

Many celebrity cooks, women's magazines and cookery sections of newspapers have actually preceded Delia in going metric-only. Let us hope that, with Delia's splendid example in mind, the remaining imperial holdouts will also soon fall into line.

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