



UK Metric Association

For a **single** *rational* system of measurement

e-mail: secretary@metric.org.uk

15 July 2014

Mr James Harding
Director of BBC News and Current Affairs
Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London
W1A 1AA

Dear Mr Harding

Re. BBC news style guide

Thank you for your thoughtful and informative letter of 11 February, and for giving detailed consideration to our comments on the BBC news style guide.

We can understand your difficulties in preparing a style guide which covers both Imperial measures, for which there are few rules, and metric measures, which follow internationally recognised rules. On reflection, perhaps we could suggest that the BBC style guide should make this distinction and point out that if using SI units, then the rules of BIPM should be followed (e.g. using the correct symbols and case, not pluralising symbols, leaving a gap between number and symbol where space permits!).

Thank you also for setting out the policy of BBC News and Current Affairs on the choice of measurement units. This was not the subject of my letter of 13 January, as we had submitted our comments on this policy in a separate submission to the BBC Trust Consultation on the News and Current Affairs Review. Nevertheless is a matter of great interest to members of UKMA, and I will ensure that your thoughts are passed on to them. Again, we believe we understand your difficulties. The UK is probably the only country in the world that is trying to run two competing measurement systems in parallel, often leaving the broadcaster with an invidious decision on which one to use. However, we think that, as the national broadcaster with a world-wide audience, the BBC is in a special position and should set a good example (in accordance with its Mission Statement).

Finally, I hope you will forgive me if I attempt to clear up a misunderstanding. Metric is now the UK's primary measurement system for most purposes - albeit, as you point out, the Units of Measurement Regulations exempt road traffic signs from this requirement. Over the past forty-nine years successive governments have expressed support in principle for a single system of measures. However, neither I nor my colleagues have claimed that the UK is a metric nation - we accept that in our daily lives we in Britain continue to use a mix of both Imperial and metric measures. If this were not so, there would be no need for UKMA, and the weights and measures section of the BBC news style guide would have been much easier to write.

Yours sincerely

Derek Pollard
Secretary

www.ukma.org.uk

Patron: The Rt Hon the Lord Howe of Aberavon, Kt, CH, QC