GOVERNMENT HOSPITALITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE PURCHASE OF WINE

240th Meeting held at Lancaster House on Thursday 5th March 2009

PRESENT	Chairman :	Sir David Wright GCMG, LVO
	Members:	Mr John Avery MW
		Mrs Deirdre Blackstock MW
		Mr Mark Pardoe MW
		Mr Sebastian Payne MW
	Joined by:	Ms Gillian Merron MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
		Ms Alexandra Davison, PS/Minister
	Secretary:	Mr Robert Alexander, GH

Minutes

1859. The minutes of the 239th Meeting were accepted as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Annual Report 2008

1860. The Chairman signed the Annual Report 2008.

Business Arising

1861. The Chairman and Secretary explained some of the background to the visit by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ms Gillian Merron MP, to meet the Committee. The Minister's responsibilities included oversight of the work of the Committee, and her interest had been increased by the recent work on FoI enquiries and various parliamentary questions (1853). The Minister had requested an early opportunity to come and meet the Committee for herself, and see it in action.

The Secretary and Chairman up-dated the Committee on the progress of the FoI enquiry mentioned in October. Following a meeting with the Minister in January, a slightly revised approach to the release of information had been agreed, and the Secretary tabled a redacted version of the stock list that was under consideration for release. This redacted list comprised a list of various examples of wines held in the cellar, without specific vintages or producers listed, which might have enabled suppliers'

details to be traced. The Committee expressed some reservations about releasing this amount of information but broadly agreed that it was a more elegant and informative solution than withholding all details of the cellar stock.

The Minister and Ms Davison, Private Secretary, arrived during the meeting and were welcomed by the Chairman. The Minister expressed her thanks to the Committee for its work, in which there was a great deal of public and parliamentary interest. The Minister recognised the expertise and value of the Committee's work, and knew from her own experience of Government Hospitality, the quality of the cellar and how effectively it was managed.

The Chairman indicated that the next agenda item had been included at the Minister's suggestion, ie. the provision of "fair trade" wines. The Minister felt it was important that the Committee should examine the arguments for and against "fair trade" wine, which she believed was an issue on which the government might be subjected to scrutiny in the future. The government had supported the Fair Trade Foundation through the work of the Department for International Development. Mrs Blackstock commented that Waitrose had carried out extensive work on "fair trade" produce, including wines, from South Africa, Chile and Argentina. The Committee undertook to find an early opportunity to taste a range of "fair trade" wines, with a view to purchase, subject to quality standards being met. [Action: Secretary]

The Secretary reported with regret that little progress had been made on new wine database (1847 and 1853) and therefore it had not been possible to produce stock reports or consumption statements for the Committee.

Stock-sheet and Consumption Statement

1862. There was no quarterly consumption statement available. The Committee examined the monthly consumption statements.

Future Tasting Programme

1863. The Committee agreed that the next meeting (241st) should take place on either the 21st or 22nd May 2009. Provisional dates for the 242nd meeting were for 4th or 5th August 2009. The Committee agreed that a review of white Burgundies should be undertaken in May. Time should be found soon to conduct a blind tasting for purchase of "fair trade" wines, and the Committee should look later in the year at 2007 Mosel and Rhein wines, and possibly 2007 Rhône wines.

Tasting

1864. The Committee was joined for part of the tasting by the Minister and Ms Davison and tasted 2005 Red Bordeaux and 2002 Vintage Champagnes, and made the following recommendations for purchase:

2005 Bordeaux

Château Belgrave 2005
Château Lagrange 2005
Château Talbot 2005
Domaine de Chevalier 2005
Château Gruaud Larose 2005
Château Brane-Cantenac 2005
Château Lynch Bages 2005
Château Pichon-Longueville Baron 2005
Château Léoville-Barton 2005
Vieux Château Certan 2005

2002 Champagne

Champagne R&L Legras Présidence 2002
Champagne J Lassalle Blanc de Blancs 2002
Champagne Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin 2002
Champagne Louis Roederer 2002

Lunch

1865. There was no guest for lunch.

Any Other Business

1866. There was no other business and the meeting concluded.

21st May 2009

Sir David Wright GCMG, LVO
Chairman