

MR



SECRETARY OF STATE

MO 22K

10 July 2003

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MEETING WITH RICHARD SAMBROOK: 8 JULY 2003

1. As agreed during their short telephone call that morning, Richard Sambrook, Director News at the BBC, called on the Secretary of State on Tuesday 8 July at 1330. Kate Wilson was present.
2. Mr Hoon briefly rehearsed why we were sure that Andrew Gilligan had not forewarned us of the WMD allegations broadcast on 29 May. Sambrook said that he had spoken to a number of people involved in the preparation of the programme and they believed that an indication of the nature of the story had been given. Mr Hoon showed Sambrook the Duty Press Officer's log for the evening in question and Kate described her conversation with Gilligan earlier that afternoon. Sambrook expressed surprise that Gilligan had discussed cluster bombs: he was not responsible for that issue. He accepted that the fault was on the BBC's side and apologised.
3. Mr Hoon raised his concern that he had been twice denied an opportunity to answer the story [that the allegations had been pre-checked with MOD] on the Today programme. Sambrook said there was a general issue about over-defensiveness on the Today programme. He suspected that the Editor had been keen not "to pour petrol on the flames". He was happy to accept Kate's version of her conversation with Gilligan and was prepared to consider issuing a statement on air that Mr Hoon felt aggrieved by the way he had been treated. Since Stephen Whittle – who he had asked to look into the affair – had not yet reported, he could not promise this now.