Ann 062/2

No. 18

REGISTRY
Action Taken

FCS/82/14

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

HMS Endurance

1. In my minute FCS/81/70 of 5 June 1981, I put the political arguments for the retention in service of HMS Endurance. The decision was nevertheless taken, as part of the defence review, to withdraw her from service this April: and you are, I understand, now considering how the ship should be disposed of.

2. The news of her withdrawal has, as expected, led to strong protest. As you know, an Early Day Motion has already been signed by over 150 MPs, the majority from our own party. The debate in the House of Lords on 16 December centred on HMS Endurance. The decision is being interpreted as a stage in a deliberate British policy of reducing our support for the Falkland Islands: and as demonstrating a lack of commitment to our sovereignty position (and to the related economic potential) in Antarctica. Our denials have had little effect; and the issue is having a disproportionate impact on the credibility of our policy in the area.

3. In view of these considerations and of the strength of feeling in the House and outside about HMS Endurance, I wonder if you could not see your way to reinstating her - in the same way as I understand you are considering doing with Intrepid and Fearless - to ease the passage of more far-reaching defence cuts through the House and in the country? I can think of no single gesture which would have such an immediate effect with public opinion, and which would also serve a very real operational purpose.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
22 January 1982