

## BAROMETER

### Prison regimes

A riot at Ford Open Prison in Sussex raised questions as to the regime in jails. This is some of what prisoners can expect:

- Category A (Whitmoor, Cambs): work opportunities in recycling, laundry and restoring computers for schools in Africa. Courses in thinking skills and anger management. Gym, sports hall and AstroTurf. Prisoners may apply for two PE sessions within a working week, one in the evening and two at the weekends. Acupuncture for staff and prisoners. Visits Thur-Mon 1400-1600, must be booked 24 hours in advance.
- Category B (Wandsworth): courses include bricklaying/plastering, industrial cleaning. Multi-choice pre-select menu with halal and vegetarian options. Visits every morning and afternoon.
- Category C (Highpoint, Suffolk): workshops in tailoring, welding/fabrication. Courses include Streetworks: traffic lights and diversions. Visits seven days a week.
- Category D (Ford): single and two-man rooms. Four town visits a month once a prisoner has been resident nine months. Overnight home visits for up to five days.

Source: HM Prison Service

### Value Added Tax

The main rate of VAT was increased to 20 per cent last Tuesday. How does this compare around Europe?

Denmark, Hungary, Norway, Sweden	<b>25%</b>
Greece, Poland, Portugal	<b>23%</b>
Belgium, Ireland, Lithuania	<b>21%</b>
Italy, Austria, Czech Republic	<b>20%</b>
France	<b>19.6%</b>
Holland, Germany	<b>19%</b>
Cyprus, Luxemburg	<b>15%</b>
Australia	<b>10%</b>
Switzerland	<b>8%</b>
Singapore	<b>7%</b>
Japan	<b>5%</b>
Canada (varies by province)	<b>5%-15%</b>
USA (set locally)	<b>0%-11.5%</b>
Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Dubai	<b>0%</b>

### Soap sensations

BBC Radio 4's *The Archers* celebrated its 60th anniversary with a man falling off a roof. How do soaps attract an audience?

Wedding and unmasking of murderer ( <i>EastEnders</i> , 19/2/2010)	<b>15.6m viewers</b>
Explosion followed by tram crash ( <i>Coronation Street</i> , 6/12/2010)	<b>12.4m</b>
Wedding and death of love child ( <i>EastEnders</i> , 2/4/2009)	<b>11.5m</b>
Murder ( <i>EastEnders</i> , 25/12/2009)	<b>10.9m</b>
One character tries to kiss another ( <i>Emmerdale</i> , 7/1/2010)	<b>9.47m</b>
Train runs into crashed car on level crossing ( <i>Emmerdale</i> , 6/10/2010)	<b>7.94m</b>

Source: MediaTel, BBC

# For the love of cod

Can our celebrity chefs save the British fishing industry?

STANLEY JOHNSON

Years — actually decades — ago, a gentleman from the British civil service, interviewing me as a potential candidate for a job in the European Commission, explained that 'all the important decisions in Brussels are prepared by the chefs'. As he spoke, I had a vision of men in tall white hats stirring dishes on a large stove in the middle of the Berlaymont.

'Chefs?' I queried.

The man quickly explained that he meant the 'chefs de cabinet', the Commissioners' aides, who basically ran the show while the great men had long lunches at expensive Brussels restaurants. Still, this vision of the all-powerful chef was a vivid one and it came back to me when I read of the preparations being made for next week's Channel Four 'television chef' spectacular. Forget about poets being the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world'. Today it is the chefs who are coming out of the kitchen into the heat of political controversy.

Not any old chefs, mind you. I barely know one end of an egg from another, but I am quite aware that these are the big boys. For most of next week, Channel Four is running programmes featuring some of the great 'celebrity chefs' of our time: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Gordon Ramsay, Jamie Oliver and Heston Blumenthal. And they are coming together for a nakedly political objective.

Let me go back for a moment to Brussels, when I first arrived there in the early Seventies. The United Kingdom, on entering the then EEC, had just given up its right to control its own living marine resources. Official documents subsequently released make it clear just how cynical the trade-off between UK fish and UK entry was. Since then, as far as the management of our fish stocks is concerned, it has been downhill all the way. The first of the television programmes Channel Four is screening next week will be presented by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. According to the blurb, HFW is determined to raise awareness of diminishing fish stocks. 'Focusing on the three species most widely consumed in the UK — cod, salmon and tuna — Hugh leaves no stone unturned in his mission to understand what is happening to the British fishing industry. In the process he is horrified to learn that up to half of all fish caught in the North Sea are thrown back dead.'

I am sure that many of the civil servants

who worked in the European Commission's Fisheries Directorate-General during my time and after were honourable and well-intentioned men. They sought, and took, advice from scientists and fisheries 'experts', but the net result in conservation terms over the decades has been disastrous. It is not just a question of wasted marine resources, scandalous though that is. There is also the issue of cruelty. Both the *Mail* and the *Telegraph* this week ran the story of Gordon Ramsay's narrow escape from being turned into a 'steak flambé' while he was filming in Costa Rica. Ramsay apparently went there to investigate the illicit trade in shark fins. 'It is a multi-billion dollar industry,' he said. Ramsay apparently evaded Taiwanese gangsters to climb on a rooftop, where he saw thousands of shark fins drying. 'When I got back downstairs, they tipped a barrel of petrol over me.' EU-flagged vessels are responsible for half the world's shark catch.

The plight of the sharks has led to some painfully slow steps by the United Nations bodies to deal with the hideous practice of finning, where live sharks have their fins cut off before being thrown back in the sea to drown. There have been other important environmental or welfare gains. For example, the task force which Prince Charles set up on albatross by-catch (birds caught on long-line hooks) has already led to a significant reduction in the deaths of albatrosses at sea.

But these measures are far too little, far too late. That is why, however unusual it may seem, the involvement of the 'chefs' is a matter of considerable importance. The celebrity chefs have a chance of engaging and enraging public opinion, in a way that few others are able to do. What, I wonder, is the correct collective noun? A 'simmering' of chefs? A 'bubbling'? What about an 'explosion' of chefs?

An explosion, I am sure, is what we need. And that, I hope, is what we are going to get next week. There are three million anglers in Britain. And there must be at least 30 million Britons who eat fish on a regular basis and would like to continue to do so. Let HFW and his fellows stoke the flames of their wrath! It may well be that when it comes to fish, the chefs have more power than the politicians.

Survival: Saving Endangered Migratory Species, by Stanley Johnson and Robert Vagg, is published by Stacey International.