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### 'Mesopotamia: disposal of rivercraft'

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#### About this record

The file consists of a document which outlines the results of an inter-departmental conference held at the India Office in April 1919 to discuss the question of the disposal of surplus river craft in Mesopotamia which are no longer needed by the military.

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Mesopotamia: Disposal of Rivercraft.

1. An inter-departmental Conference was held at the India Office on the 8th April 1919, to discuss the question of the disposal of surplus rivercraft in Mesopotamia. The following were present:—

SIR THOMAS HOLDERNESS (in the Chair).  
LIEUT.-COL. A. T. WILSON, Civil Commissioner, Mesopotamia.  
CAPTAIN J. V. BRETT, War Office.  
CAPTAIN JACKSON, Inland Water Transport.  
CAPTAIN HARRIS, Ministry of Supply.  
MAJOR H. W. YOUNG, Foreign Office.  
MR. J. E. SHUCKBURGH, India Office.

2. Colonel Wilson explained briefly the objects which the Mesopotamian Civil Administration have in view in this connection. They are as follows:—

- (1) To ensure that rivercraft, if disposed of locally, should not come into the possession of other than British or local firms; such firms being required to guarantee that at least 75 per cent. of their holdings are owned by British or local subjects.
- (2) That no action should be taken that would confer, or might be interpreted as conferring, a monopoly upon a single individual or firm, or that could give rise to complaints at the present juncture of the exclusion of foreign subjects as such.
- (3) That Messrs. Lynch Brothers should be permitted to purchase a sufficient number of ships to bring their fleet up to its pre-war standard, and that for this purpose they should—subject to their tenders being satisfactory—be given the first refusal of the necessary vessels.
- (4) That Indian shipping firms should be permitted, if they so desire, to repurchase vessels previously owned by them, and requisitioned by the military authorities for service in Mesopotamia, on the understanding that such vessels will revert, on repurchase, to their original use.
- (5) That, in the interests both of the revival of British trade and of the demobilisation of Inland Water Transport personnel, as many vessels as possible should be released forthwith.

3. Colonel Wilson went on to make certain specific recommendations as to the best means of giving effect to the policy outlined above. He prefaced his remarks by a description of the constitution, &c., of the "Sales Board" now functioning at Baghdad. This body was constituted by the General Officer Commanding, Mesopotamia, with the approval of War Office, to co-ordinate the disposal of surplus military stores by the various military Departments concerned. It consists of the heads of all Departments having stores for disposal, under the presidency of the Director of Ordnance Stores. The Secretary (Lieutenant-Colonel Mackay) is a specially selected officer of commercial experience, who is also Director of Civil Stores, and works in the closest co-operation with both the civil and military authorities. The results hitherto attained by the Sales Board have been highly satisfactory; sales have been spread over a wide area according to local needs, and, as a consequence, excellent prices have been realised. Owing apparently to doubts as to the procedure to be followed, rivercraft have not hitherto been included in the Board's sphere of operations.

4. Colonel Wilson's specific recommendations were as follows:—

- (a) All rivercraft declared by the military authorities to be surplus to military requirements should be reported at once to the Sales Board, Baghdad.
- (b) The Sales Board should be authorised to dispose by sale of all such craft as may be reported to them, calling for sealed tenders in the case of large vessels, but with discretion to sell small craft by auction if considered desirable.

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- (c) Conditions of payment, &c., should be decided by the Sales Board, who will have discretion to allow credit, on adequate security being given, up to a maximum of 12 months.
- (d) The Civil Commissioner should have the right to veto any tender, without reason assigned; this condition is considered essential in order to prevent vessels falling into undesirable hands.
- (e) The Anglo-Persian Oil Company should be given the option of purchasing oil barges, tugs, launches, &c., required for the purposes of their business, subject to satisfactory arrangements as to purchase price, conditions of payment, &c.

5. Colonel Wilson mentioned that the rivercraft now in the hands of the military authorities probably number some 300-400, exclusive of barges. Replying to questions, he said that full weekly returns of all sales effected are prepared by the Sales Board, Baghdad; copies of these returns could be supplied to the Ministry of Supply if the Civil Commissioner received the necessary instructions through the India Office. Any communication that the Ministry of Supply might wish to address to the Civil Commissioner should be transmitted through the India Office.

6. The Committee concurred generally in Colonel Wilson's proposals, and recommended their submission for early sanction to the Departments concerned. The India Office representatives undertook to take the necessary action in the matter.

INDIA OFFICE,  
5th April 1919.