assess the potential impact of various climatic anomalies on various crops, particularly the new high yield varieties, and should consider plant breeding strategies, as well as techniques of crop, soil and water management, that can reduce the impact of climatic stresses on agricultural productivity. Special attention should be given to the role of soils in mitigating the impacts of drought, and to the improvement of dryland-farming practices, as more and more semi-arid lands are brought under cultivation.

Application of new and existing agricultural technology to improvement of crop yields in regions that supply food for their own consumption seems to be at least as valuable in the long run as striving to continue to increase yields in exporting regions such as the United States and Canada.

Policy makers must assess national and international policies on agriculture and food in the light of the probability that major food shortages,

affecting large regions if not the entire world, can be expected to result from climatic stresses over the next few decades. Although years of bad climate such as 1972 may not necessarily reduce total world food production, they clearly have the potential for disrupting world food trade patterns and raising prices to the extent that people in some regions will go hungry not because there is no food, but because it costs so much that they cannot afford to eat properly. The potential is great for conflict among nations as well as for human suffering in the regions that are affected directly by climatic anomalies.

There does not seem to be any miraculous 'technological fix' waiting in the wings to save the day. Agricultural technology probably can be applied to achieve additional increases of 100% or more in crop yields in some regions, primarily those where food consumption is highest, but such increases are not likely in most of the present major food-producing regions.

Climate forecasting will be useful only if workable alternatives are available so that the farmer can respond to the foreknowledge that a drought or a short growing season is imminent. Weather-modification technology may have the potential for improving crop yields in some regions under some conditions, but it has not been demonstrated that cloud seeding can do much, if anything, to remedy major climatic anomalies such as large scale droughts.

Science and technology certainly have appreciable contributions to make to solutions to our growing climate-food-society problems. But the evidence that has emerged from the recent conferences indicates clearly that the responsibility for establishing a framework within which scientific and technological knowledge can be applied effectively to solving the problems rests as much with the policy makers as it does with the plant breeders, the climatologists and the cloud seeders. □

A small experiment now taking place in Britain seems to be having results that warrant a little more attention from our drought-stricken sociological experts. I refer to the resistance of the Anglo-Saxon mind to metrication, a resistance which, whether inwardly sullen or sudden, is outwardly passive so long as our feet are not pushed to the wall. For the inevitably vociferous, the issue is seen in the emotive terms of an unimpeachable heritage threatened from without, and the City Editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* euphorically praises "the glorious indifference of the British people [to metrication]", himself excepted, presumably.

Because, here in the USA, metric measures are now unofficially and surreptitiously appearing in all sorts of odd corners, from the food and building industries to sports events, not to mention our completely ravished science, we are not indifferent to watching the unenthusiastic attitude of the British to losing their 2,000-year-old Roman measures. Admittedly, the decimal Roman measures became a little unmetrified after the UDI of Hengist and Horsa in a petrified British culture, but Anglo-Saxon we have staunchly remained for the 1,500 years since.

Are we now to throw over that measured tradition? Galileo learned, to his cost, the strength of tradition when, in the naive cause of truth, he tried fervently to upend it overnight. Pope Gregory's reform of the calendar was regarded by the English as even more of an occasion for cheating than the recent decimalisation of £.s.d. Tradition! Should we resist and drop

metrication, except for odd corners of science that can easily be swept clean again; should we denigrate, admire or diplomatically ignore the resolution of South Africa in enforcing it by law in one fell swoop; or do we characteristically muddle on with a facade of creeping metrication that is merely a

Failing to take the point

P. A. MOHR

measure of creeping paralysis of will?

Certainly, the British Metrication Board, in urging the people of Britain to think metric for reasons of logic and utility alone, has completely misjudged the Anglo-Saxon mind. Those who oppose metrication see the ultimate argument quite clearly: metrication is alienation. Logic and possible future utility make no impact on the gloriously indifferent.

Can the Imperialists . . . (no, that won't do) . . . Can the opponents of metrication discover that the non-Anglo-Saxon world, by discarding multifarious old measuring systems, has impaired its heritage? It might make for an interesting discussion; but surely many would prefer to regard tradition as something not merely inherited, but to be fashioned for those who will inherit it, hopefully improved, from the living. Otherwise we would still be sticking to the measuring

system of Boadicea, without the benefit of those delightfully duodecimal Roman "uncias" of length and weight. (British readers, now perhaps only able to afford their tobacco by the gram, may be interested to know that in the USA "one pound" of pipe tobacco has shrunk to 12 ounces, in precise conformity with the original definition, but not, alas, out of any respect for tradition.)

Need we go metric? Cannot measuring systems of the world co-exist as do languages? Is there a good case for Britain and the USA to drop, or stop, the whole costly and unwanted experiment and re-trench? As far as I am aware, the token metrication of Britain has barely entered everyday thought, estimation and judgment. One does not see Mr. Wilson, one of Britain's better known pragmatists, contemplating his bowl in centimetres and °C.

If metrication, an abomination of a word redolent of graduation in dietetics, really is desirable for us Anglo-Saxons, then it will not stem from the will of the people in their present mood. Either those in authority must coerce, or those favouring the change must be seen to step aside from the appointed bureaucrats of Whitehall and Washington, and start cutting ice, or, for those who disdain the methods of Sam Adams and the founders of the American Revolution, advertise the fact in the manner of the huge, state sign on the main Boston-Montreal highway: "Barre, 100 kilometers".

Maybe we can continue along the broad way, rather than take the narrow road of decision. But I fear that, in nautical parlance, we're tying ourselves in unfathomable knots.