

FUTURE STORAGE OF REDUNDANT NUCLEAR SUBMARINES: THE PUBLIC HAVE THEIR SAY

9 November 2001

An independent report from Lancaster University has set out the issues the public wants the Ministry of Defence to take into account in finding the best option for future land storage of redundant nuclear submarines.

Defence Minister Dr Lewis Moonie said:

"We have been open and consultative from the start as we have carried forward this important project, and I welcome the work Lancaster University had done on our behalf in identifying issues the public wishes to see taken into account. The report makes over 60 recommendations, which we will consider carefully."

"I note that some consultees want an end to building new nuclear submarines until we have a long term disposal solution. We are tackling the issue of disposal, but we cannot ignore the fact that nuclear powered submarines are a key component of our defence. We have had a dramatic reminder of this only recently with our submarines involved shoulder to shoulder with the US Forces right from the start of the war against terrorism."

"I can put to rest any concern raised by the public that profit will be the driving force for the involvement of industry in this project. The safety of our nuclear submarines in operation has always relied heavily on the manufacturing skills of private industry and the support from the privatised dockyards. Safety is the driver, not cost. But there is no reason to exclude from this work the expertise of companies, including those who have helped build and safely maintain the submarines."

The Centre for the Study of Environmental Change at Lancaster University conducted its work - known as "Front End Consultation" between January and July this year. The consultation involved eight separate discussion groups, four stakeholder workshops, as well as a citizens' panel, made up of a random group from the public like a jury. The university also hosted a dedicated web site, which remains available to provide information and give the public the chance to feed in further views.

The report notes that the public considered the consultative exercise a positive step, but were concerned that involving private industry would mean the decision was driven by profit, and wanted the MOD to do more to engender trust and understanding. There was public support for storing the submarines on land rather than afloat, with a preference for storing the intact reactor compartments, rather than further dismantling. Some members of the public also wanted a halt to construction of nuclear submarines until a long term disposal route had been established.

The MOD will give detailed consideration to the report and publish its response to the recommendations.