

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 21 July 2004

DEFENCE

Project ISOLUS

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): On 4 February 2004 I informed the House of Commons that Ministry of Defence owned coastal sites were being considered for their suitability to store radioactive material from nuclear-powered submarines under Project ISOLUS. That exercise is now complete and one site, the royal armaments depot (RNAD) at Coulport in Dumbartonshire, has been found suitable in principle. One of the industry bidders, Serco Assurance, in partnership with Parsons Brinckerhoff Ltd. and RWE Nukem Ltd., is seeking to use a MOD site in their proposal and they will now be asked if they wish to incorporate Coulport into their bid, as will the other bidders.

I want to make it clear that this does not mean that Coulport has been selected as the storage location—there is still much work to be done before a final decision is made. Nor does it mean that industry has to incorporate the site in any bid. It does, however, mean that those other coastal sites included in the review, some of which have been the subject of considerable speculation, have been assessed as unsuitable and are not storage options.

Coulport has, of course, previously been named in an industry bid, and is one of the sites on which we consulted the public last year. I do not envisage setting in train further consultation at this stage. If, however, any of the proposals from industry change in substance as a result of the inclusion of Coulport we will instigate a further public consultation exercise. As at all stages of the ISOLUS process, safety, in terms of the general public, the workforce and the environment, will be a key factor in all of our decisions. The concerns expressed by the public during the events at the various sites named in each of the industry bids have been captured by the 50 recommendations contained in the Lancaster University report on the consultation exercise. These recommendations are currently being considered and, following consultation with other government departments and devolved administrations, a Government response will be published later this year.

The exercise to identify potential MOD sites has concentrated on those by the coast in view of the current preferred option of land storage of cut out intact reactor compartments. The 118 sites were assessed against the following criteria: sufficient spare capacity to accommodate a storage facility; long term security of tenure; development of a storage facility that is feasible and cost effective, would not breach existing agreements with MOD, NATO or other countries, and would not inhibit the site's current principal operational function; access from the sea, capable of accepting heavy loads; and no safety hazard, such as flooding, coastal erosion and whether the site is used for handling and storing explosives, or where unexploded ordnance has been identified, for which there is no cost effective engineering solution.

In parallel with the detailed consideration of the outcome of the public consultation, and informed by the recommendations flowing from it, evaluation of the various industry outline proposals will be completed.

We expect to be able to announce early next year how the project will be taken forward. Moreover, the Government remains committed to a further round of public consultation before any final decisions are taken.