

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS4)

Ministry of Defence

Written Statement made by: **Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon)** on 28 May 2015.

Safety at HM Naval Base Clyde

I am informing the House at the earliest opportunity on the investigation of each of the claims made by Able Seaman William McNeilly about the operational effectiveness, safety and security of our nuclear deterrent.

Having now completed our investigation, and having consulted with the appropriate regulatory and operating authorities, I can assure the House that neither the operational effectiveness of our Continuous at Sea Deterrent nor the safety of our submariners or members of the public have been compromised.

The Naval Service operates its submarine fleet under the most stringent safety regime, which is subject to independent scrutiny. The Naval Service does not put a submarine to sea unless it is safe to do so, and there are appropriate procedures in place to deal with any issues that may arise during its deployment. There are robust regulatory mechanisms, both within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) but independent of the Royal Navy and, externally with the Office of Nuclear Regulation, to ensure this. The MOD is also held to wider account by Parliament.

Able Seaman McNeilly published his comments following his first submarine deployment. He was under training, and his access and exposure to activities and material on board were appropriate to his security clearance. We have found no evidence that he raised any concerns with colleagues on board or with the Chain of Command: had he done so, the more senior and experienced submariners would have been able to explain how the boat operated and why McNeilly's concerns were unfounded. A number of the issues he raised did not occur during his patrol.

Most of McNeilly's concerns proved to be either factually incorrect or the result of mis- or partial understanding; some drew on historic, previously known, events none of which had compromised our deterrent capability and, where appropriate, from which lessons had been learned to develop our procedures as part of a continuous improvement programme. Only one of the allegations remains to be fully examined – the allegation that e-cigarettes were being used within the submarine. No independent corroboration of this has been found but even if it were true, there is clear evidence that their use did not put the safety of the boat at risk.

Able Seaman McNeilly was arrested having not reported for duty after a period of leave. He was released the next day, but confined to a specified location in Portsmouth while interviews were conducted. He is being afforded the duty of care that we give all our personnel, is in contact with his family, and is still in the employ of the Royal Navy.