

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS482)

Ministry of Defence

Written Statement made by: **Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon)** on 25 Mar 2015.

Royal Navy Nuclear Reactor Prototype Review

On 6th March 2014, my predecessor announced his decision to refuel the nuclear reactor in HMS Vanguard, one of the UK's four ballistic missile submarines, during its planned deep maintenance period. This was a prudent precaution following the discovery of a microscopic breach in the cladding around one of the fuel cells in the prototype reactor plant at our Shore Test Facility at Dounreay in Scotland. My predecessor also asked the MOD Chief Scientific Adviser to review again the evidence on which the decision was taken not to prototype the next generation PWR3 reactor, due to be fitted in the Successor ballistic missile submarines.

The review was undertaken by three eminent nuclear experts, Professor Robin Grimes, Professor Dame Sue Ion and Professor Andrew Sherry. I have received the review Panel's report and am grateful for the Panel's efforts and insights.

The Panel concluded that it was a valid decision not to prototype PWR3. They also agreed that there was no practical course of action that would have enabled a prototype facility to be built ahead of the first Successor submarine.

The Panel have advised that, with no PWR3 shore test facility, far greater requirements will need to be placed on other elements of the submarine enterprise to provide data, experience and assurance to underpin safety and availability especially those elements that are unique to the UK. As such, I have agreed to their recommendation that the Department undertake a Nuclear Propulsion Capability Review to ensure the necessary capability and capacity is in place to sustain these requirements. This review will form part of the Department's routine work to ensure that continuous at sea deterrence can be sustained now and in the future.

The review confirms that the Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment will not be required to support reactor core prototyping activity beyond 2015, as set out to Parliament on 2 November 2011 (Official Record, Col 37WS). It is anticipated that defueling and fuel management activities will continue at the site until 2022. The Vulcan Defuel and Decommissioning project is assessing detailed options which range from placing the prototype facilities into care and maintenance (while retaining the site's strategic capabilities), to decommissioning the site and returning it to Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. Initial decisions on the future of the site are expected around 2016.