



Ref : EIR2023-028

[REDACTED]

22nd August 2023

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your e mail requesting the following information:

We have recently discovered documentation in the National Archives relating to the repatriation of Plutonium from Maralinga, Australia in 1980. The documentation states that the plutonium was repatriated to Aldermaston in six sealed drums.

Please can you provide the following information:

- 1. Details of the monitoring of the repatriation of the drums in Maralinga, during transport and on disposal to include levels of radiation.*
- 2. Details of the protective clothing worn by the soldiers when preparing the drums for transport in Maralinga.*
- 3. Details of the standards applicable at the time for the storage and transportation of radioactive waste.*
- 4. Details of the UK Sea Dump where the barrels were finally dumped, including the geographical location and monitoring of the dump as per IAEA standards.*
- 5. Details of the communications with the countries where the material was flown over, informing them of the flight.*
- 6. Latest monitoring statistics and reports for all waste material from the British Nuclear testing program, up to 2022 as per IAEA standards on radioactive waste storage.*
- 7. A copy of the full report in 1980 regarding the operation.*
- 8. Details of the servicemen involved and their current status (Alive or Dead) and if possible, dates and causes of death.*



ANNEX

The technical content of the paper covering the actual recovery and packaging of the waste is a true record of the procedures adopted but inferences may be drawn from the report on the method of transport from Australia to the UK and the method of disposal of the material in the UK. Disclosure of this information in an unclassified report would not be in keeping with the spirit of the agreement the UK Government had with the Australian Government when the repatriation was planned.

In view of this, the UK Government would be grateful if the report could be amended from paragraph 21 onwards to:

- (i) remove reference to the concrete filling operation of the drums and the markings on the drums which indicate to the informed observer that the materials were being prepared for disposal as components of a UK sea dump operation; and
- (ii) particularly in paragraphs 44 and 45, to remove reference to the dates of the operation to return the material to the UK (since these, coupled with the Australian press announcement, make it clear that the material was repatriated to the UK by air, giving rise to possible questions from countries which might worry about an overflight).

The following textual changes would also need to be made (those up to paragraph 21 are minor in nature; the others are more substantial):

On 31st July 2023 we acknowledged your request for information under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) (The EIR can be found at the following link:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2004/3391/contents/mad>

and asked for clarification, specifically requesting the reference number for the document mentioned in point 7, the reference number would enable us to search the Company archives within a reasonable timespan.

You replied to this request on 1st August 2023, thank you, providing a photocopy image of the front page, it appears to be a letter from The British High Commission and addressed to an individual in The Department of Foreign Affairs. AWE cannot locate either the original document/or a copy.



We have addressed each of your points in turn, independent of the information contained in your attachments and we are writing to advise you that the information that you have requested is not held by AWE.

The information is therefore exempt under regulation 12(4)(a) of the EIRs, which relates to information which is not held at the time when an applicant's request is received. Regulation 12(4)(a) is a qualified exception, which usually means that a public authority is required to conduct a public interest test to determine whether or not information should be disclosed or withheld. However, the Information Commissioner, who is the independent regulator for requests made under the EIRs, takes the view that a public interest test in cases where the information is not held would serve no useful purpose.

Therefore, in line with the Information Commissioner's view, AWE has not conducted a public interest test in this case. The information is therefore exempt under regulation 12(4)(a) of the EIRs, which relates to information which is not held at the time when an applicant's request is received.

However, under our duty to advise and assist applicants in pursuance of regulation 9, We can suggest you make your enquiry to Sellafield at : [How to make a freedom of information \(FOI\) request: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications. If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled you have a right to request an internal review within 40 days of receiving this letter, by writing to information.requests@awe.co.uk or our postal address: Information Requests Team, AWE Aldermaston, Reading, RG7 4PR. If you are still unhappy after an internal review has been completed, under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Regulation 18 of the EIR you have the right to take your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office. Please note the Commissioner will generally not consider a complaint until you have exhausted AWE's internal complaints process.

Yours sincerely,

AWE Information Requests Team