



Nuclear Information Service **2008 Annual Report**



Nuclear warhead dis-assembly/assembly bunkers at AWE Burghfield. Details of a 'near overwhelming' flood in 2007 came to light in 2008.

CHAIR'S REPORT

The spotlight has been on AWE Burghfield this year. Burghfield is situated between Aldermaston and the conurbation of Reading, and its location in the floodplain of the Kennet Valley accounted for the flooding there in July 2007. The event was played down by AWE but NIS's report "Swamped", records just how serious it really was. The report was taken up by Channel 4 News in October and subsequently by local, regional and other national media.

The NIS Board has been very gratified by the number of times NIS's work has featured in media reports.

NIS has also done a very creditable job in exposing the safety shortfalls at Burghfield which have been a matter of great concern to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate for some time, causing them to ration the warhead assembly work.

At Aldermaston, work on the plans which are billed as being for "maintaining a capability" for servicing and/or replacing Trident have continued apace, but no new planning application has gone unreported, unexamined or uncirculated and some have met with up to 600 objections thanks to NIS's efforts.

In June, the NIS case against Trident was heard by the High Court, but we were refused a Judicial Review, yet granted leave to appeal, which we did. Undaunted when the Appeal was also rejected, our legal team, headed by Michael Fordham QC, persevered with its view that the Government

is not above the law, and a hearing of the case against Trident was a legitimate matter for a Court to examine. With financial help from supporters, we were able to take a last, but regrettably unsuccessful, step with an oral hearing in January 2009.

High on the Board's agenda has been the finding of a Project Director to succeed Di McDonald when she retires in summer 2009. We are delighted to announce that Dr. Peter Burt, an experienced and knowledgeable disarmament worker, is to take over and will be in place from May 2009 for a transitional hand-over period with Di. Peter has an impressive track record as a researcher, trainer and lecturer in environmental, human rights and disarmament disciplines and has worked as a consultant with NIS over the past year.

We are grateful to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust not only in enabling NIS work to continue, but to move to its office to Reading, where it will be nearer the action.

Evelyn Parker - NIS Chair

NIS works to promote public awareness and foster debate on nuclear disarmament and related safety and environmental issues. While our core costs are met through charitable grant aid, unrestricted project and legal costs are met by donations. We are grateful to groups and individuals for their financial support, which is needed now more than ever. Donations may be made on-line at www.nuclearinfo.org or by cheque to NIS, 30 Westwood Road, Southampton SO17 1DN.

LIVE NUCLEAR WORK STOPPED AT AWE

After two years of warnings from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate(NII), the MoD finally stopped live nuclear work at the sub-standard warhead assembly/disassembly plant at AWE Burghfield. These aging 'Gravel Gertie' bunkers are where fissile and High Explosive components are combined in Trident warheads. NIS exclusively revealed this stoppage when it was disclosed in the NII AWE 4th Quarterly Report published in April.

"AWE has agreed that no live nuclear work will be carried out until the necessary ALARP fixes are in place."

NII 4th Quarterly Report on AWE. 2007
(Published 8th April 2008)

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/nuclear/llic/2007/aldermaston4.htm>

In May, Defence Minister Bob Ainsworth explained, in answer to a Parliamentary Question, that it was the potentially catastrophic flood on 20th July 2007 that forced the MoD to agree that AWE should stop live work. A NIS Briefing on AWE Burghfield led to a major report in the Guardian and Sunday Observer revealing that live warhead work was officially suspended for nine months and then further restricted to reduce the risk of a nuclear accident - no live work could be done until AWE applied to the NII for a license for each operation.

"The Burghfield flood is a timely warning," said Di McDonald of the Nuclear Information Service which keeps a watching brief on Burghfield. 'Climate change requires a new risk assessment of whether these weapons pose more of a risk than they are supposed to deter.'"

Sunday Observer 25 May 2008



Presenter Peter Snow introducing AWE Flood film on CH4 News 13th October 2008

SWAMPED!

Our major report, **SWAMPED!** uncovered new information about the serious flooding of the AWE Burghfield warhead dis/assembly 'Gravel Gertie' bunkers in July 2007. The report, by our consultant Peter Burt, and based on Freedom of Information data disclosed by the MOD for AWE, was published in September. Channel 4 News reported the issue in depth on 13th October, causing a Local Planning Committee Councillor to raise questions at AWE's Local Liaison Committee Meeting that Don Cook, Managing Director of AWEplc was careful not to answer. One of the

most shocking revelations was that AWE took the decision not to alert the regulators or the public until the crisis was over, totally counter to national recommendations, after the floods in July 2007:

"...we firmly believe that the public interest is best served by closer cooperation and a presumption that information will be shared, We must be open, honest and direct about risk, including with the public. We must move from a culture of 'need to know' to one of 'need to share'."

Pitt Review 06/08 ES7

Congratulations on breaking the story came from retired Guardian defence correspondent, David Fairhall, and from colleagues in the disarmament sector.



Flood water overflowing from North Ponds radioactive wastewater store at AWE Aldermaston

BOTH SAFETY REGULATORS WARN AWE

In March, the Environment Agency served AWE with a warning notice, concerning the loss of a small radioactive source on a training exercise. In April, it was the turn of the NII to issue an Improvement Notice on Operating Rules at both AWE Burghfield and Aldermaston sites. NIS discovered that AWEML has no liability in the event of prosecution. Managers at AWEplc, the nuclear licensee, would be the ones in the dock.

NUCLEAR TRANSPORT

Only one live convoy is thought to have delivered a warhead from AWE to RNAD Coulport this year, with two convoys returning them for decommissioning - unsurprising since the key warhead facilities at AWE were hardly functioning. A warhead convoy was spotted on the M5 near Exeter in April, thought to be transporting reactor parts and fuel from Rolls Royce Marine Power Operations Ltd, Derby for the Trident refit at Devonport Dockyard. New TCHD tractor units and trailers are due in service in 2010 equipped to carry either warheads or Special Nuclear Materials. Existing SNM vehicles seem confined to short runs with SNM long hauls using the more reliable TCHD units, anticipating the change in 2010.

*"*Mr. Bob Ainsworth:* The current [SNM] load carrier ...*

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Support demonstrated for NIS case against Trident at the High Court. June 2008

CONTROVERSIAL PLANNING DEVELOPMENTS AT AWE

2008 brought three major MoD planning applications for AWE Burghfield: a High Explosives Fabrication Facility, Conventional Manufacturing Rationalisation Facility and a Warhead Dis/Assembly complex to replace the substandard 'Gravel Gerties.' As usual, key information was redacted from the application documents for national security reasons, making it impossible for experts, including the NII Regulators, to assess the potential safety risk to workers and the wider community. Officially,

these unknown quantities do not affect safety, but according to Consultant Nuclear Engineer, John Large, without this hidden data it is not possible to judge the safety of the new design. The MoD repeatedly claims that risks are kept 'As Low As Reasonably Possible' but then adds the justification of 'national security'.

The long-expected Plans for replacing the dis/assembly facilities finally appeared a few days before Christmas, with the public consultation period falling right across the Christmas holiday season.

THE CASE AGAINST TRIDENT

In June, the NIS case against Trident and its replacement was heard by the High Court. We argued that the 2006 Government White Paper was flawed, that a promised public consultation did not take place and that the Government is not above the law. Michael Fordham QC representing NIS outlined our case, but we were refused a Judicial Review, with leave to Appeal. Undaunted when an Appeal failed in October, our legal team conceded the Consultation point and persevered with an oral hearing, but without success, in January 2009.

INTERMEDIATE STORAGE OF LAID UP SUBMARINES (ISOLUS)

The task of finding a safe and publicly acceptable method of storing nuclear submarine waste has intensified, with a Technical Options Study and planning for a 2009 Public Consultation. The MoD is in uncharted waters, navigating the rocks and sandbanks of the Public Consultation process of ethical decision-making, under the watchful eye of the ISOLUS Advisory Group (IAG).

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/csec/isolus2/isolus-homepage.htm>

IAG meetings are convened by the MoD and are open to the public. Members include, safety regulators, industry, academics, consultation experts, NGOs and a member of the public. Di McDonald serves on the Group along with Peter Lanyon and Jane Tallents from the Nuclear Submarine Forum and Ian Avent from CANSAR, the Campaign Against Nuclear Storage and Radiation.

The key issues for de-fuelled submarines are:

- (i) where to dismantle the submarines?
- (ii) how will it be done? Is it safer to cut out the reactor compartment (RC) and store it whole, cut out the reactor and store that whole or cut up the RC for packaged storage in anticipation of a national geological storage facility sometime in the future?

- (iii) where to store the waste in the interim, between dismantlement and any move to a national storage facility?

NIS, the Nuclear Submarine Forum and other 'Green' members of IAG continue to be concerned that the cutting up process will involve greater radiological risk than keeping the RCs intact. On the other hand, do we want to leave this waste for the next generation to deal with? As time goes by, radiation in each hull reduces in activity, reducing the risk.

Storage site(s) will be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment and probably a Public Inquiry.

An accident in February, when HMS Superb was damaged in the Red Sea, reminded the public of the vulnerability of submarines, despite official complacency:

"In this case it seems the submarine hit an uncharted pinnacle and that's what happens."

Jason Aldrewick, Maritime Analyst, International Institute for Security Studies

Four of the eight decommissioned submarines stored afloat in Devonport Dockyard have spent fuel aboard awaiting completion of new de-fuelling facilities in 2012, costing more than £147M. Seven de-fuelled subs. are stored at Rosyth near Edinburgh where holes in the hull of HMS Revenge, an old Polaris boat, were found in April. Participants in the public consultation will need to balance getting these old submarines out of the water as soon as possible with ensuring safety and public acceptability of the storage sites.

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vehicles are now planned to continue in service until the end of 2010. It is planned to replace them with eight refurbished truck cargo heavy duty trailers and nine newly purchased tractor heads. I am withholding information on the cost of each vehicle as disclosure of this information would prejudice commercial interests."

Hansard Report 30 Apr 2008 : Column 484W

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

NIS worked closely with all the media and our monthly NIS Update continued to provide information on AWE, particularly on MoD Planning Applications for AWE. Re-developed by our Administrator and Website Manager, Joe Hudson, the NIS website is constantly updated. The number of visits to our website grew over 300% in the first 3 months of relaunch, and now has consistently over 5000 visitors per month (150,000 'hits').

NIS took part in parliamentary discussions with MPs and their researchers on several topics. In October NIS supported a Nukewatch Exhibition when the film 'Deadly Cargo' was shown at a drop-in event in Portcullis House, Westminster. MPs had a photo opportunity and saw for themselves the convoy going through their constituencies. DVDs were sent to those unable to attend. In July, Di spoke to Wolverhampton Trades Council and has arranged speakers for groups throughout the year, enabling a two-way dialogue with regulators and emergency planners.



NIS NETWORKING

NIS continues to work with national, regional and local groups including: Peacerights, the Nuclear Submarine Forum, Nukewatch, the Nuclear Awareness group (NAG), Solent Coalition Against Nuclear Ships (SCANS) and Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp(aign). We supported the successful AWPC challenge of AWE Byelaws when senior judges in the Court of Appeal acknowledged that the Camp was a protest in its own right and therefore legally valid.

In November, the PITS distribution part of a nuclear accident Exercise, Foxwater'09, was brought forward in order to accommodate the use of Southampton Docks by HMS Trafalgar in December. SCANS reported that the rehearsal of naval ratings' distribution of Potassium Iodate Tablets to reduce the thyroid gland's absorption of radioactive iodine was flawed. The object was to identify all the front doors in the Hythe community, close to the submarine operational berth, but on the opposite side of Southampton Water in the New Forest. Even with close support of Council officers, the house-to-house survey was patchy. SCANS Monitors observed the Exercise closely and reported:

"Based on this exercise, SCANS considers it highly unlikely that everyone down-wind of the submarine would be reached by PITS distribution teams in the event of a real radiation emergency."

SCANS Hythe PITS Exercise Monitoring Report 25th November 2008

A nuclear accident a few days earlier in Devonport Dockyard, Plymouth did not boost safety confidence when up to 280 litres of water, likely to have been contaminated with tritium, poured from a burst hose as it was being pumped from the submarine in the early hours.

**SCANS group, protesting against the berthing of a nuclear powered submarine in Southampton docks.
5th December, 2008**

From 1st June 2009
NIS address is:
85, Southampton St.
Reading
RG1 2QU

Financial Statement

	Income	Expenditure
Income reserved in our legal fund from 2007 and 2008 donations met our	2007 60,063	55,400
legal costs this year. The reserve will meet outstanding costs in 2009. We are grateful to all the donors and to JRCT and PPCF for core and project grants respectively. NIS Treasurer, Duncan Barnet again gave invaluable professional advice and examined the accounts.	2008 50,375	51,993

Obituaries

Wendy MacLeod-Gilford

Wendy struggled with pain and ill-health for many years and died, aged 69 on 20th December by her own hand.

From 1960-1980, she worked at AEA's Laboratories and Plessey Radar at Harwell, and in 1985, married Mick Gilford, when together they founded Blewbury Environmental Research Group. Wendy was admired and respected for her tenacity in researching and reporting on Low Level Radiation risks and we will miss a valued and well-informed colleague.

Di McDonald