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Gibraltar demands sub safety report

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HMS Tireless has a leak in its reactor coolant system

The government of Gibraltar has told Britain it is not satisfied that it would be safe to repair a Royal Navy nuclear submarine stranded on the Rock.

► **Peter Caruana, Gibraltar's chief minister**
 "The MoD needs to think long and hard"
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Repairs to HMS Tireless, which has been stuck in Gibraltar since May, are due to begin on Monday.

But the territory's chief minister, Peter Caruana, is calling for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to release details of its safety report to both the Gibraltar Government and an independent panel of nuclear experts before any repair work is sanctioned.

"The MoD needs to think long and hard about whether it proceeds with the repairs, unless the government and the people of Gibraltar can be satisfied that there is no risk to public health," he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

“
Nuclear repair issues are highly emotive and people are entitled to reassurance
 ”

Peter Caruana

The territory's government was initially neutral on the issue but has written to Whitehall in protest, as fears among the population of Gibraltar have grown.

'Highly emotive' issue

Mr Caruana said while Gibraltar was a "willing host" to the MoD, there was no precedent for

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repairs to a nuclear vessel being carried out in The Rock's Naval dockyards.

He said: "The people of Gibraltar are used to receiving visits from nuclear submarines and are very relaxed about that.

"But nuclear repair issues are highly emotive and people are entitled to reassurance."

HMS Tireless has been docked at the port since May after a fault reported in her reactor cooler system forced the vessel to make an emergency stop.

The Gibraltar Government wants information from the MoD safety case, which has already been carried out, to be put before an independent panel of British nuclear experts to assess any potential risks.



Over 1,000 Gibraltar residents staged a protest

It is not clear what action Gibraltar could, or would take, if the Royal Navy decides to go ahead with the repairs.

The controversy comes in the wake of an accident in the Barents Sea which has stranded a Russian nuclear submarine, with a crew of 118, on the seabed.

But Mr Caruana said the objections did not revolve around "an anti-nuclear issue".

He said: "This is an issue among friends, the MoD is a welcome member of the community in Gibraltar - they make a valuable contribution to our economy."

Mass protest

On Wednesday, around 1,000 Gibraltarian residents took part in a protest against the repair proposals.

Members of a campaign group, the Concerned Citizens Group, have been collecting signatures from people on the beaches at Gibraltar.

They feel the wishes of Gibraltarians are being ignored by the MoD, and are calling for the

submarine to be moved back to the UK.

The Navy is offering guided tours on the submarine to placate residents' fears over safety

Janet Howitt, of the campaign group, said:
"We have no problems about being a colony or a supporting base for Great Britain.

"It is just this is a nuclear submarine and we feel it should be prepared in a suitable environment for nuclear submarines and not 500 metres from a residential population."

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