

The Gibraltar government panel of experts has now reported to the government and state that the Ministry of defence have not yet concluded the design and planning of their new proposed repair scheme and the panel have not therefore yet been able to assess its safety implications. "The slippage in the programme has apparently been due to delays incurred by the MOD in the diagnosis of the defective piping," said a government statement tonight Wednesday.

In summary, the panel has stipulated that it requires to be satisfied that the MOD fully understands the cause of the defect before it proceeds to repair the defect. The MOD have not yet established the cause of the defect with certainty nor developed a practical repair scheme. This had been due to occur by mid November.

The panel of experts add that the diagnosis and analysis of the defect therefore continues. The MOD now intends to trepan (cut out) a circular section of the main pipe, which includes the defective area, and to return this to the UK for thorough examination. This assessment of the definitive further work will take about three weeks.

During this 'holdover' period no further work will be undertaken on Tireless and the hole in the main pipework will be temporary sealed. The delay of about one month has arisen because this time has been taken up with the development, manufacture and trials of the special cutting rig required to trepan the junction section. The panel considers that there are no appreciable nuclear risks associated with this delay and the intended cutting operation. With the MOD not yet able to give a full description of the proposed repair scheme and its technical justification, the panel is scheduled to meet the MOD again on 21 December.

The MOD believe that it may be in a position to commence repairs in the second or third week in January, but the panel doubts that this will be the case, given the amount of design manufacture and regulatory work that remains to be done in the UK.

The experts say they continue to be satisfied with the arrangements and safeguards relating to the handling of management of radioactive wastes.

The panel have asked for direct access to speak to and question key design and analysis personnel at future meetings. Given the prolonged extension of Tireless in Gibraltar following the delays encountered, the panel is awaiting further justification from MOD relating to its rejection of the option of returning the Tireless to the UK. An interim report will be issued upon receipt of this information.

The panel have made, and the Gibraltar government has accepted, the following recommendations:

- 1) That the government does not oppose MOD proceeding with the trepanning operation as part of the diagnostic process and the subsequent temporary sealing of the hole in the main primary circuit pipework, pending a decision on the carrying out of the repairs themselves.
- 2) That the Government does not sanction any other primary circuit intrusion works until the panel has sufficient information, following the meeting scheduled for 21 December to assess the risks of any other diagnostic or repair activities that might be carried out in the reactor compartment.
- 3) That the panel be consulted by MOD prior to any further works being undertaken beyond the trepanning operation.

4) That the panel views the repair trials to be conducted in the UK, if required, and that the panel engages directly with MOD personnel and its consultants and sub-contractors who are directly involved in the repair scheme preparations and its practical implementation.
(22.11.00)

*IN FULL: Report of experts, to follow.