

Sub to be scrapped after refit costing £100m

by Kim Fletcher

THE NUCLEAR submarine Warspite, which is nearing the end of a £100 million refit, is to be scrapped.

The decision to decommission the 23-year-old submarine was part of the Government's programme of defence cuts, the Navy said. But the announcement came only eight months after a serious fault was found in the vessel's reactor cooling system.

Government MP's called on the Opposition yesterday to scrap Warspite so soon after spending £100 million on the refit.

Mr Martin O'Neill, Labour defence spokesman, said: "I shall be asking the reasons why this decision was taken and the sums involved in the defence waste of money. A Liberal Democrat, the spokesman, said: "This is a flagrant waste of money. A fault was found in the submarine's cooling system in February of this year. Why was no decision taken then?"

A Navy spokesman said the decision to scrap the Warspite was regarded as a cost saving. He said: "There was no point in spending time and effort finishing the refit only to scrap her in a few years' time."

But a union official at Devonport dockyard, Plymouth, claimed the refit was done, being scrapped because of the fault rather than as part of defence cuts announced in the Ministry of Defence document, Options for Change.

Mr Bill Goffin, Plymouth district secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, said: "There are a lot of questions unanswered. How can you spend £100 million refitting a nuclear submarine almost to the point of completion and then say you are going to scrap her?"

Warspite, commissioned in 1967, is the second oldest of the five Valiant and Churchill class submarines. When Mr King, Defence Secretary, announced plans in July to reduce to 16 Britain's fleet of submarines, they were seen as possible candidates for scrapping.

Warspite will be the third nuclear vessel to be scrapped, following Dreadnought, and the Churchill-class Conqueror. The Conqueror's decommissioning was announced in July.

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