

From Commodore R P Boissier ADC Royal Navy



NAVAL BASE COMMANDER
Semaphore Tower
HMS NELSON, HM Naval Base Portsmouth
Hants
PO1 3LT

Tel: 02392 722835

Fax: 02392 724041

Mr Michael Waugh
Flat 12
Eliot House
Portswood Road
Southampton
SO17 2TH

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Dear Mr Waugh

NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINES USE OF SOUTHAMPTON DOCKS

Thank you for your letter. Your concerns regarding the use of Southampton Docks for nuclear powered submarine visits are noted.

A nuclear reactor accident did not occur on HMS TIRELESS and at no time was the safety of the public or the submarine's crew ever at risk. TIRELESS suffered from an engineering defect that was entirely within the crew's ability to contain – it is precisely to provide the highest levels of public safety that we train the crews of our nuclear submarines so thoroughly. The fact that steps have been taken to check the integrity of all of our hunter-killer submarines is further evidence of the Royal Navy's commitment to nuclear safety.

The temporary enhancement of the Gibraltar Z berth to carry out the repair of HMS TIRELESS was a very special case. The Ministry of Defence and its independent nuclear safety advisers were absolutely clear, after detailed consideration of the available options, that the best and safest course of action was to conduct the repair in Gibraltar rather than in the UK some 1000km away. Returning a submarine with a similar defect from Southampton to an established UK nuclear submarine repair facility to carry out the repair would not present anything like the same difficulty or risks.

Nuclear safety is, and will continue to be, of paramount importance during visits by nuclear submarines to any Z berth, including Southampton. As and when such visits go ahead, they will only be conducted with the co-operation of all the relevant Local Authorities.

Yours sincerely,
Paul Burnie
