

Hansard 24 10 00

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operational availability of the submarine fleet. [134444]

Mr. Spellar: A flaw has been found in pipework that forms part of the cooling system in some Trafalgar and Swiftsure class hunter-killer submarines. Initial indications are that this may have arisen from the original construction of this component. The repair of this flaw, if needed, is straightforward but, because of the stringent safety procedures that we employ for any work involving repairs to our nuclear submarines, the repair process will take some months. As responsible nuclear operators, we take even the slightest flaw to our submarines very seriously. It is for this reason that our deployed hunter-killer submarines are being brought alongside to be inspected. Until all inspections have been completed it is not possible to determine fully the requirement for repair work and operational implications but they will be significant. The submarines remain safe, and at no time has there been any risk to their crew or the general public. Vanguard Class Trident submarines, which are of a very different design, are not affected.