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MP puts pressure on MoD over A-sub life-span

By MARY CULLEN

PRESSURE is growing for the Ministry of Defence to come clean on the state of the ageing Polaris fleet, Britain's independent nuclear deterrent based at Faslane.

An all party defence select committee report published last week says it would be in the interests of the general public and the MoD to be more candid about the extent of the defects which have been identified in the submarines.

It has been widely reported that only one of the four boats is operational and two others are so seriously damaged that they are unlikely to sail again.

Dumbarton MP John McFall, who is a member of the select committee and a long time campaigner for more openness on the part of the MoD, appeared on BBC television's *Scrutiny* programme to call for more information to be made available.

And he warned during a Navy debate in the House of Commons last week that issues of safety and credibility are involved.

DOUBT

The select committee report says it is satisfied that no submarine will put to sea unless it has been declared safe to do so.

But it emphasises that despite requests for information about the situation regarding Polaris, the MoD has not been forthcoming.

And it adds: "In view of the concerns that have been expressed in public, we believe that it would be in the general interest, including that of MoD, to be more candid."

The report goes on to say that committee members are concerned about delays in the Trident programme which is due to replace Polaris in the mid 1990s.

There is now a growing doubt that Polaris will survive long enough to be replaced by Trident.

During the Navy debate Mr McFall said: "The select committee report mentions the rise in radiation levels recorded at Devonport and Faslane.

"Will the Minister assure me that if there are defects to be attended to neither civilian nor naval personnel will be put in jeopardy?"

"It ill behoves the MoD not to answer such questions."

Jack Dromey, national secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, claimed that the operational requirements of keeping the nuclear deterrent at sea were ultimately overriding safety.

And he has asked for talks with government ministers about the levels to which workers are being exposed when they are working on the repair of faulty submarines.